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CEREBUS WORLD TOUR

MANCHESTER
VERMONT
JULY 1, 1995

A.C.E.

ALTERNATIVE COMICS EXPO

(see back cover for details)

CEREBUS mothers & daughters 45

195 JUN

CEREBUS
NO. 195 JUNE 1995

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MOTHERS & DAUGHTERS
a novel

•

BOOK ONE
(Cerebus 151 to Cerebus 162)
Flight

•

BOOK TWO
(Cerebus 163 to Cerebus 174)
Women

•

BOOK THREE
(Cerebus 175 to Cerebus 186)
Reads

•

BOOK FOUR
(Cerebus 187 to Cerebus 200)
Minds

THE

Having been asked by Brad Fusco if I would be willing to give a talk at Amherst College while I was in Massachusetts for the Neil Gaiman 'Guardian Angel Tour' reading (which went very well, raising in excess of four thousand dollars for the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund), I decided the occasion was a good opportunity to answer some of the criticisms of self-publishing that have been raised now that we have been, collectively, making some inroads in the comic-book market. I've asked Linda to italicize the portion that provided the largest motivation behind the talk. I promise you that I didn't start screaming at that point. I just wanted to call attention to and clarify my position on the particular subject in question. I have more than enough unpopular views of my own, thanks. I don't need to be accused of unpopular views I don't share.

I'd like to thank the two dozen or so people who turned up for the 'gig', everyone who bought something from the CBLDF table, and Denis Kitchen and Neil Gaiman for not heckling me from the back of the room.

As self-publishing in the comic-book field begins to irrefutably demonstrate its significance and its strength in the closing hours of the twentieth century — assailed on one flank by the vested interests of the comic-book publishers, on the other by the stubborn adherence to the failed experiment of corporate control of creativity on the part of most creators, distributors and retailers, threatened at its core by the unreliability and self-deception of many of its practitioners — I think the time is right for an assertion of the cornerstones of self-publishing which underscore its nearly limitless potential.

The first of these is the control of creativity by creators themselves: control not only of the direction, shape and substance of our storytelling; control not only of our choice of the means by which our work is distributed; control not only of the content and editorial thrust of our publications; but control by creators of every aspect and implication posited by the existence of our intellectual properties.

There are two choices open to the self-publisher. The first is to retain all rights and title to each and every aspect of his or her legal claim to exclusive proprietorship of the intellectual property created by him or her. The second is to license or to sell outright all or part of that proprietorship to outside parties. Underlying these choices are both the nature of the creator in question and the motivation behind his or her creativity. I have no sympathy with the view that a cartoon creation which becomes a household brand name is an inherently more worthy cartoon creation than one that is not. But I freely acknowledge that that view is widely held in the creative community. I have no sympathy with the view that a cartoon creation which generates millions upon millions of dollars for its creator and for merchandising companies around the globe is an inherently better cartoon creation than one that does not. But I freely acknowledge that that view is widely held in the creative community. I have no sympathy with the view that providing employment opportunities for young creators in writing and drawing comic-book stories under the direction and control of proprietor-creators is a worthy or noble step forward for the comic-book medium. But I freely acknowledge that that view is widely held in the creative community. The difference is a fundamental one. For some comic-book creators — and I count myself among their number — the telling of stories, the merging of words and pictures on the printed page, the purity of the expression, is both the means and the end of creativity. For others, expression is the means by which they attract the attention of larger economic entities, the end not reached until their creation adorns shelves in toy stores, mainstream bookstores, the television screen and the cinema screen. Had I been delivering this address even a year ago, I might have allotted much of my time and energy to drawing a sharp distinction between these two viewpoints. Fortunately, the recent successes of *Strangers in Paradise, Tyrant,*

BIG PICTURE

AMHERST COLLEGE
APRIL 6, 1995

A Distant Soil and others, the imminent success of *Bacchus, Hilly Rose, Stray Bullets, Thieves & Kings* and others would seem to indicate that self-published creativity as both means and end within itself has at last achieved a toehold, however tentative it might be, in the comic-book marketplace.

Having faced, for many years, the strongly held view that self-publishing was, if not impossible, at the very least unlikely *in the extreme, I am much amused by the fact that the same people who advanced this notion for years are now cautioning that self-publishing is about to become too successful, fretting and whining that the comic-book marketplace is facing a glut of third- and fourth-rate comic books. The more excessive of these voices ascribe to me the view that a self-published comic book* — any *self-published comic book — has inherent merit. To the extent that it reflects sufficient optimism and dedication on the part of a creator to write and draw a comic book and pay for its printing out of his or her own pocket, this is true. But I concur only to that extent and no further. There are many comic books being published today that I think are without a single redeeming facet, which sell very well. There are many comic books being published today that I think are remarkable and engaging, which sell barely a few hundred copies. This is as true in the mainstream and in the avant-garde as it is in self-publishing. The fate of any comic book is in the collective hands of the marketplace. A comic book can be made to sell better through the hard work of its creator — maintaining a reliable schedule of creation and publication, assisting retailers with promotional materials, building a network of supporters in the comics press and at the distribution warehouses — and THIS is as true in the mainstream and avant-garde as it is in self-publishing.*

And that brings me to what I perceive to be the greatest strength and the greatest weakness in the field of self-publishing — the creator-publishers themselves.

The greatest weakness, of course, is that they are human beings at the mercy of their own failings and inadequacies. The human mind is a devilish trickster and the creative mind doubly so. For some self-publishers, all of their efforts are expended in writing and drawing their books, maintaining their announced schedule of publication and maintaining the simplest and most streamlined business structure that they can manage. For many, unfortunately, much of their creative effort is expended in inventing newer and more innovative excuses for not living up to their commitments. Their books are well regarded and they are given the benefit of the doubt more often than not. The marketplace is forgiving of human failing — up to a point. And then an accumulation of good faith is gradually whittled away to nothing. For many, the urge to build a bureaucracy proves irresistible. It is an unfortunate truth that there is not enough work in keeping the wheels of a self-publisher's business turning to warrant more than one part-time employee. More than one self-publisher — myself included — has fallen prey to spurious expansion at one point or another. The business manager, overworked, hires an assistant to do all the unglamourous jobs — like wrapping boxes of books, filling small orders, answering inquiries and fan mail — hanging onto the glamourous tasks: going to trade shows and conventions, and talking on the phone with friends in the business. Soon, the assistants hire an assistant to do all of the unglamourous jobs so that they can confine their labours to going to trade shows and conventions, and talking on the phone all day. The result is an inflated payroll, an inflated phone bill and the relentless pressure to come up with interesting and exciting make-work projects — none of which are as interesting or exciting as going to conventions and trade shows, or talking on the phone all day.

Whatever inadequacies and failings are endemic to an individual comic-book creator, the surest way to discover them is to self-publish. Being your own boss is a very attractive idea for most people. But being a good boss requires knowing yourself thoroughly, recognizing your own weaknesses and eliminating them wherever possible, and recognizing your own strengths and taking full advantage of them. You can be your own good boss — monitoring yourself constantly and striving always to improve your productivity and effectiveness — or you can be your own bad boss — punishing yourself with internalized rage, giving up on yourself, or ignoring your performance and making excuses when you become slothful and unfocussed.

When you're your own boss, you can phone in sick if you want to, but you're not fooling anyone.

Self-publishing represents to a far greater extent than any other creative field the idealistic goal of equality of opportunity. For equality of opportunity is not synonymous with guaranteed success. What is guaranteed is that a new comic book from a self-publisher is granted the benefit of the doubt by distributors and retailers. Their assessment of a creative work, of necessity, is founded on instinct, and the basis of the assessment is the answer to the question: is this a comic book of a professional level of quality? Will this comic book sell? How many copies will this comic book sell? To the unpracticed observer it might seem that there is no vast improvement or difference between the judgement passed on a creative work by an editor or a publisher or a retailer or a distributor, but I would maintain that there is a vast difference. In the former case, the creative work is judged not just on its commercial potential, but is judged as well on the potential perceived relative to every other comic book in a publisher's line. The attention, promotion and advertising that a publisher will devote to the creative work is a fraction — of whatever size — of the publisher's total attention, promotion and advertising. If the work is perceived to be a book of marginal potential, it will receive marginal attention. And whatever attention, promotion or advertising it receives will be at a maximum

level at its launching. The following month it will be replaced, by another creation and another team of creators, at the periphery of the publishing house's collective focus.

Within the confines of self-publishing a distorted self-perception is the greatest risk to the success of a creator. No less than in the avant-garde and the mainstream, there is a nearly infinite number of examples of creative works that can most charitably be described as substandard, hackneyed, cliché-ridden and unprofessional, which are perceived by their creators to be daring, innovative and topnotch. A self-published work that has the greatest chance of success is one where the creator or creators strike a balance between dissatisfaction with his, her or their efforts and the ability to see objectively what merit their work possesses. A self-published work that has the greatest chance of success is one where the creator is able to learn quickly the requirements of business, printing and distribution, and conform to those requirements while maintaining a productive schedule of creativity — a productive schedule which is maintained not over a period of a few weeks or a few months, a few pages or a few issues, but a schedule which is maintained, day in and day out, over the course of many years. This is not to say that a self-publishing creator cannot achieve success with sporadic productivity and an unreliable shipping schedule, and it is not to say that regular productivity and reliable shipping are a guarantee of success. But the history of the direct market has shown clearly, time and time again, that unreliability works against a creator's own interests and that reliability works in his or her favour.

In the larger context of the history of comics, there is every indication that what comic-book fans desire most is a creator who starts out good and gets better and who maintains a reliable level of productivity. This has always been and remains to this day the hallmark of those who have left the most indelible marks upon the history of the medium. Jack Kirby is best remembered for his periods of greatest productivity. As are Robert Crumb, Harvey Kurtzman, Will Eisner and others. In many cases, with many of our best talents, these productive times were interrupted by the capricious intrusion of editors and publishers, unforeseen changes in company policy, the imposition of guidelines unacceptable to the creator's sense of right and wrong. Implicit in self-publishing, which puts all controls and all decision-making in the hands of the creator, is the opportunity — for the first time in the history of the medium — to circumvent these inevitable and destructive intrusions. The largest issue facing us today is whether these intrusions constitute *reasons* on the part of the creative community for the fitful nature of our medium's progress or if they are mere *excuses*.

Without question, the potential is there for any comics creator prepared to meet the challenge. This is the first time in the history of creative expression that success or failure rests primarily, if not exclusively, on the shoulders of the creators themselves. Self-publishing provides a venue for the unappreciated mainstream creator, for the mainstream creator whose style is deemed unfashionable by the hidden consensus of excessively market-conscious editors and publishers. It is the promise of an escape route for those trapped in the work-made-for-hire factory systems of animation and commercial art, for those excluded and ostracized by the 'emperor's new clothes' ethic of gallery art, for those unable and unwilling to endure the business-before-art realities of television and the movies. The price of admission to this haven is as reasonable as could be imagined in the late twentieth century — and the doorway as close as the nearest quick-print shop.

The greatest strength of self-publishing — and the reason, I think, that it has become a more viable option for comic-book creators — is the fact that it confounds the defeatist notion that 'it's not what you know, it's who you know' and the equally defeatist notion that a comic book can't succeed unless it is published by a known company and written and drawn by a known creator. Three years ago no one had heard of Jeff Smith or Cartoon Books. He had published the first three issues in late 1991 and early 1992, and *Bone* had a circulation of around one thousand copies and was facing certain extinction. He made contact with Larry Marder, Don Thompson and others, giving them copies of his book. The quality of his efforts was indisputable. In a marketplace where there was nothing being published that was remotely *like Bone*, *Bone* became a runaway success in a matter of a few months. A comic book of indisputable quality, circulated even in photocopy form, has its greatest chance for success at this point in time than it has ever had before in the history of the comic-book medium.

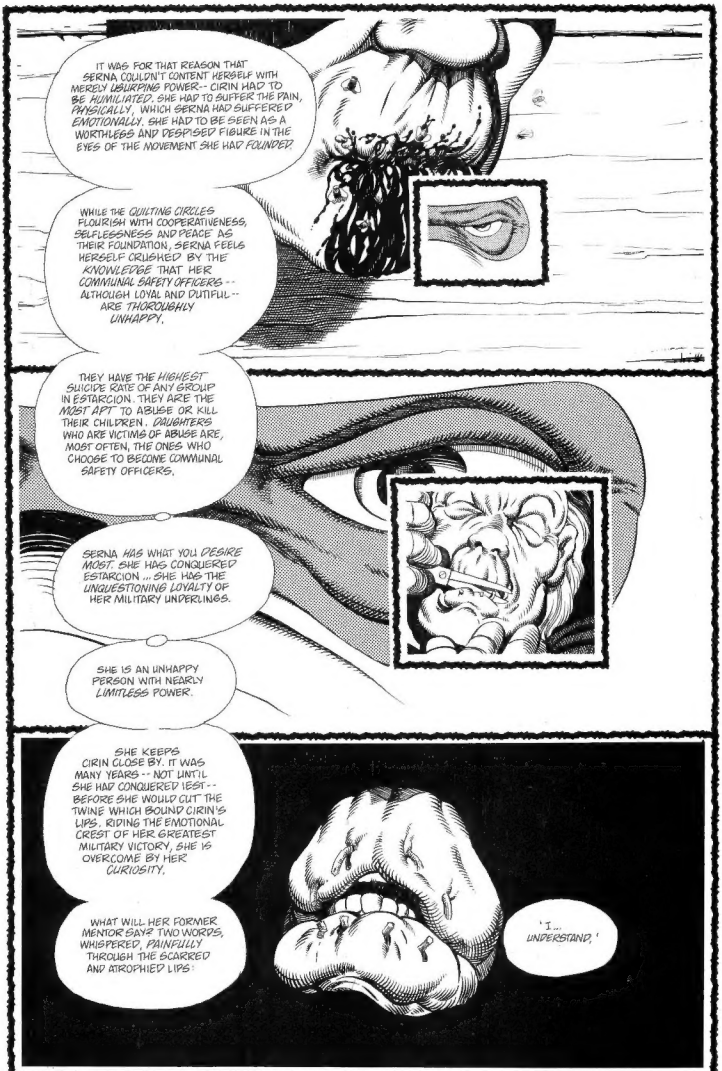
Self-publishing is becoming an attractive option for many mainstream creators who have been frustrated for years by editorial perception of their abilities. People like Steve Bissette, Rick Veitch, Colleen Doran and Mark Wheatley, admired by many but relegated to being everyone's third, fourth or fifth choice to work on a project at one of the major companies, have found no such constraint in the field of self-publishing. Long resigned to the fact that the perception of their abilities figured more prominently in editorial assignments than did their actual abilities, these creators have been able to illustrate that editorial prejudice and creative performance in the marketplace are more often diametrically opposed to one another than they are widely held to be by editors and publishers. *A Distant Soil* is a best-selling, self-published comic book, not *in spite* of Colleen Doran's work but because of it. In a field where a female creator has been widely perceived to be a handicap to a book's success — and where a book done by a female creator usually had its success attributed to the strength of its characters or the company logo on its cover — self-publishing has provided a venue and a forum where the quality of a creative work is judged solely on its own merit.

It is the road less travelled and it is not an easy one. Like some quest in a high-fantasy novel, it takes the measure of each man and woman who would traverse its length, and the percentage of casualties is very, very high. Each success doubles the stakes, increases the pressures, taxes mind and spirit, and draws heavily on inner resources and resourcefulness. But in an age when each doorway seems closed and bolted, each course of action and direction self-evidently futile in the face of corporate corruption, and the deck stacked at the outset against any possibility of success, the door to self-publishing stands open, beyond the control of any group and within the grasp of any individual. It is not a club or a clique, a secret society or a coalition. Each self-publisher differs one from another in every aspect imaginable — philosophy, politics, gender, race, nationality. We are united only in the structure of what we do — that we own and control our own creativity and that we are the final arbiters of what is done or not done with our intellectual properties. There is no reason that a black woman, an Asian man, a Norwegian, a Hispanic or a Native North American could not have the largest-selling and most successful self-published title in six months' time, exceeding even the current high watermark represented by Jeff Smith and *Bone*. There is no glass ceiling or barricade of any kind in self-publishing save those represented by the limitations of the individual who self-publishes. We sell in the same marketplace and while we are as competitive — if not more so — as any group of individuals seeking to make an indelible mark in a creative field at the dawning of a new age, the competition is a friendly one. On the business side the view is nearly unanimous that what benefits one of us benefits us all. What is good for self-publishing collectively is good for each individual self-publisher.

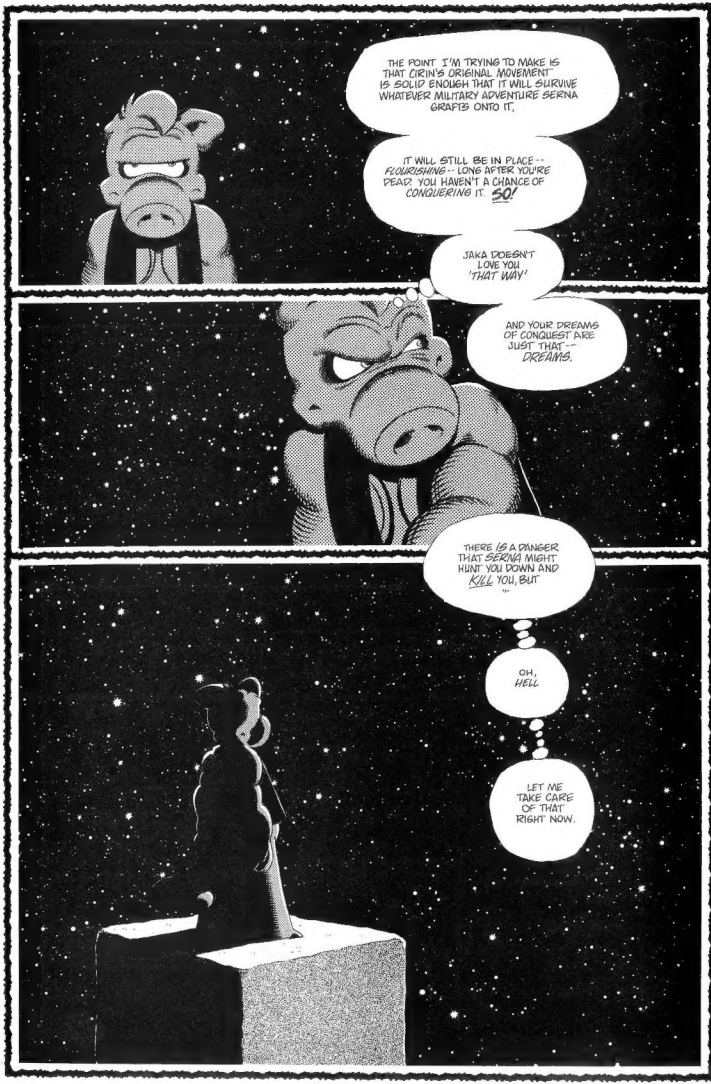
Genuine equality of opportunity is rare — as rare as the efforts to achieve it through legislation and external authority are commonplace. It is my considered view that the commonplace efforts are doomed to failure. It is that reason that makes me an unswerving advocate of self-publishing as the only sane choice for a comic-book creator now and in the future.

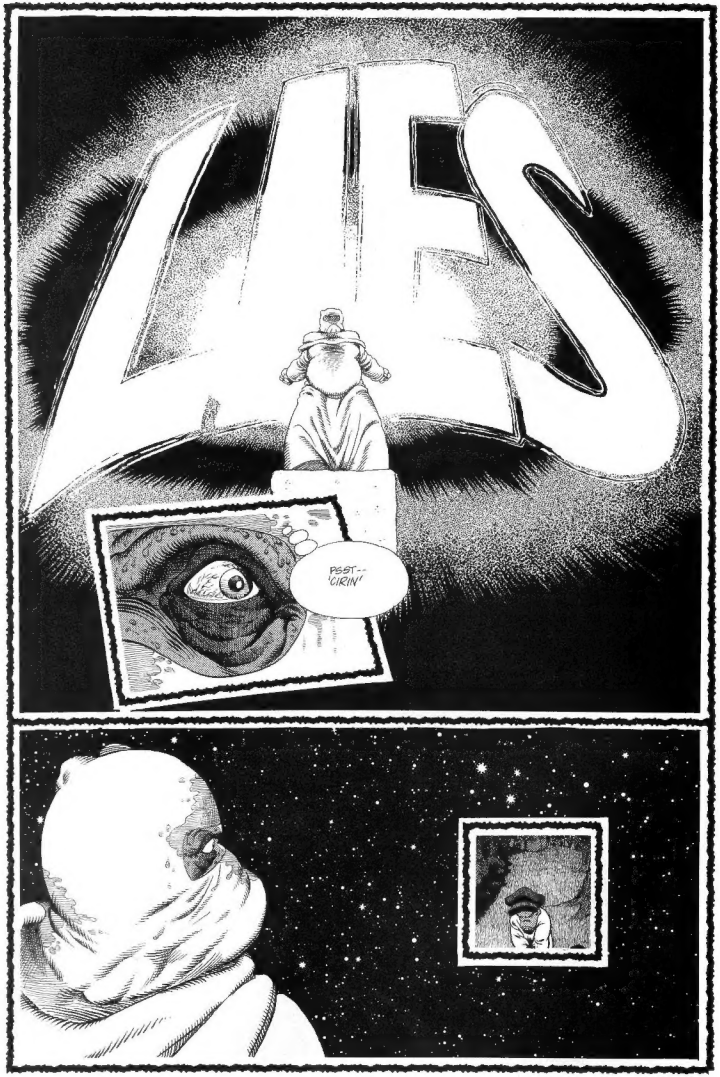
SERNA – AS YOU CAN HEAR – IS UNABLE TO ACKNOWLEDGE HER PAST. IT IS THE COMMONEST OF MISAPPREHENSIONS THAT AN ACT OF BAD FAITH DID NOT TAKE PLACE IF IT WENT UNNOTICED.
SHE INHERITED CIRIN'S METICULOUSLY CRAFTED MOVEMENT SO THOROUGHLY IN TUNE WITH HUMAN NATURE AND HUMAN IDEALS...
...AND GRAFTED ONTO IT A WAR MACHINE WHICH HAD ABSOLUTE TOLERANCE FOR THE FREE EXPRESSION OF IDEAS AND A BRUTAL INTOLERANCE OF ANY ACTION TAKEN OUTSIDE OF CLEARLY DEFINED PARAMETERS.
AGAIN, THOROUGHLY IN TUNE WITH HUMAN NATURE AND HUMAN IDEALS.
THE QUILTING CIRCLES ARE THE ENGINE WHICH DRIVES THE MOVEMENT, WEAKENING AND MAKING VULNERABLE EACH OLIGARCHY, EACH DICTATORSHIP, EACH URBAN CENTER, EACH SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT...
COUNTRY AFTER COUNTRY FALLS TO THEM -- VIRTUALLY WITHOUT BLOODSHED, INTO THE POWER VACUUM STEPS THE FORMER SERNA AND HER COMMUNAL SAFETY OFFICERS
THEY ARE MORE FEARED THAN RESPECTED, BUT A CONSENSUS PREVAILS: 'SAFETY FIRST', 'ONLY THE VIOLENT ARE PUNISHED'.
IN ANY ENVIRONMENT, THE SYSTEM WHICH IS THE MOST TOLERANT OF DISSENT, WHICHEVER SYSTEM BEST MIRRORS HUMAN NATURE WILL FLOURISH, HOWEVER IMPERFECT IT MIGHT BE.
THE LEAST IMPERFECT SYSTEM WINS -- SO TO SPEAK.
WHICH IS WHY YOU COULD NEVER CONQUER ESTARCION.

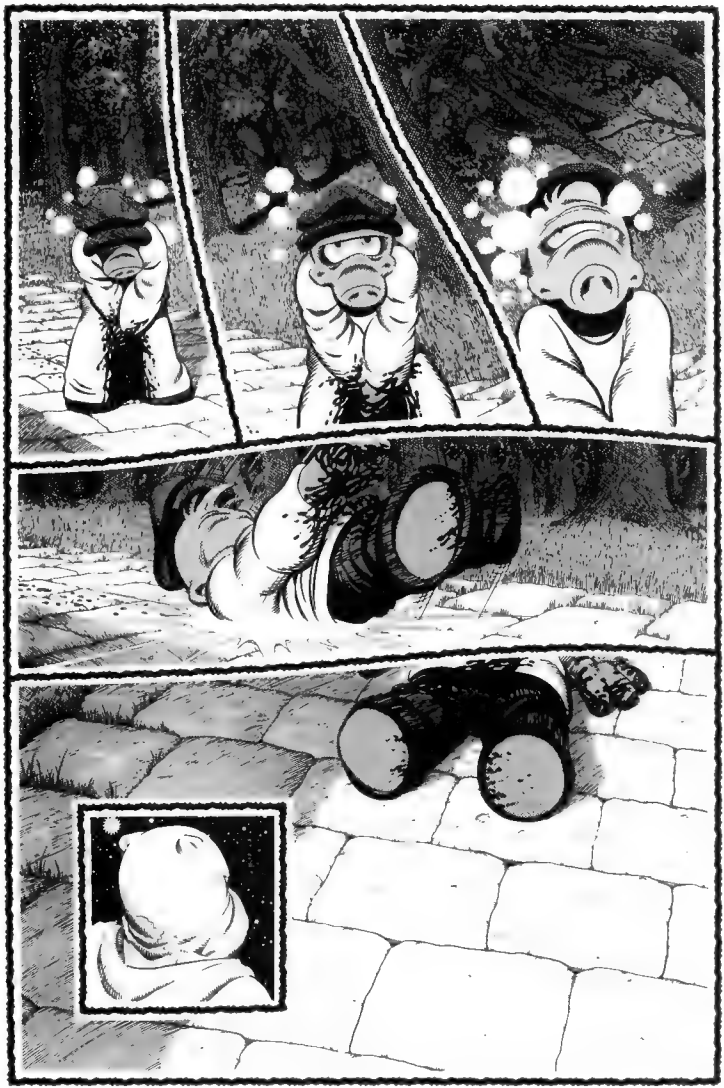
BLUNTLY PUT, YOU HAVE NOTHING TO OFFER -- YOU HAVE NO SYSTEM IN MIND IMPERFECT OR OTHERWISE.
BEING PRIME MINISTER, BEING POPE SHOULD HAVE SHOWED YOU THAT -- BUT OBVIOUSLY DIDN'T.
MORE ON THAT IN A MOMENT.
CIRIN WANTED TO HELP AND SHE DID HELP. SHE REPLACED COMPETITIVENESS, GREED AND VIOLENCE WITH COOPERATIVENESS, SELFLESSNESS AND PEACE.
SHE LIVED EXACTLY AS SHE THOUGHT OTHERS SHOULD LIVE, SHE DID HER FAIR SHARE OF THE WORK
AND SHARED -- EQUALLY -- IN ITS REWARDS
NO MORE AND NO LESS.
SERNA IS AN AARDVARK. LIKE YOU, SHE... MAGNIFIES TRAITS IN OTHER PEOPLE. SHE MAGNIFIED CIRIN'S OWN NATURE AND MADE THE MOTHERHOOD POSSIBLE
CIRIN INTRODUCED THE ROBES AND THE HOODS -- ORIGINALLY -- TO ALLEVIATE HER DEAREST FRIEND'S ANXIETY ABOUT HAVING MISSHAPEN FEATURES...
...
TO ALLOW HER TO PASS MORE FREELY AMONG 'NORMAL' PEOPLE. WHAT CIRIN DIDN'T REALISE WAS THAT SERNA'S RESENTMENT AT BEING CONSIDERED A 'MONSTER' WAS ONLY MADE WORSE BY BEING CONSIDERED 'ORDINARY'...
FROM A VERY EARLY AGE SERNA HAD COMPENSATED FOR BEING CONSIDERED WORTHLESS BY DECIDING THAT SHE WAS SUPERIOR -- INFINITELY SUPERIOR -- TO EVERYONE.

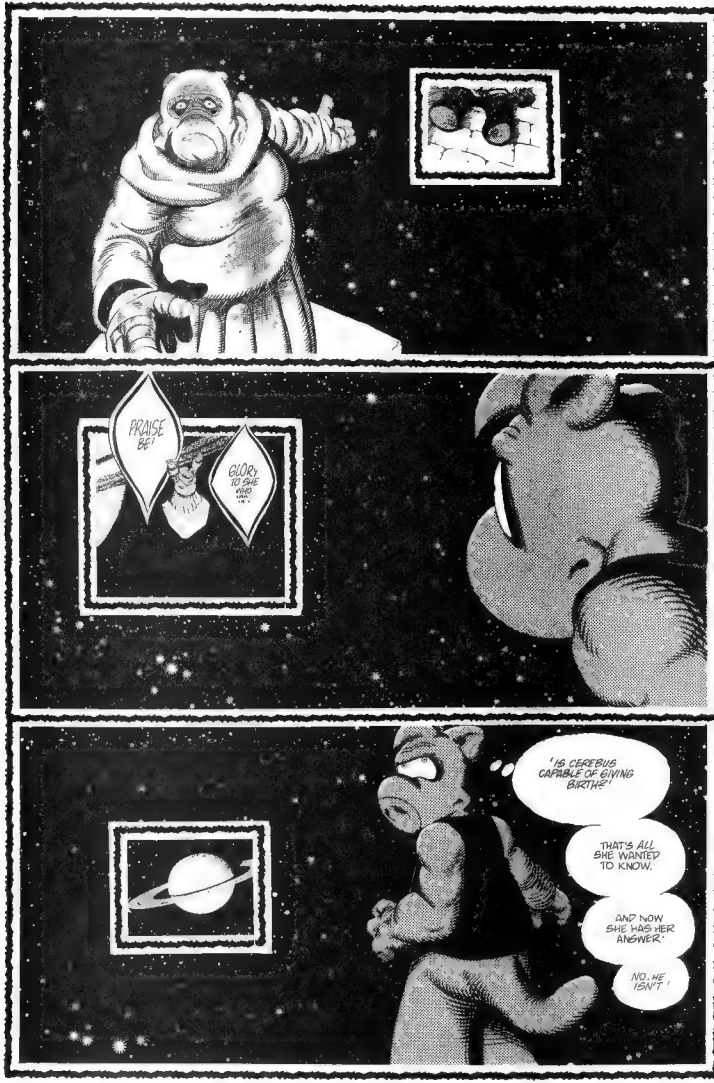

IT WAS FOR THAT REASON THAT SERNA COULDN'T CONTENT HERSELF WITH MERELY USURPING POWER -- CIRIN HAD TO BE HUMILIATED. SHE HAD TO SUFFER THE PAIN, PHYSICALLY, WHICH SERNA HAD SUFFERED EMOTIONALLY. SHE HAD TO BE SEEN AS A WORTHLESS AND DESPISED FIGURE IN THE EYES OF THE MOVEMENT SHE HAD FOUNDED.
WHILE THE QUILTING CIRCLES FLOURISH WITH COOPERATIVENESS, SELFLESSNESS AND PEACE AS THEIR FOUNDATION, SERNA FEELS HERSELF CRUSHED BY THE KNOWLEDGE THAT HER COMMUNAL SAFETY OFFICERS -- ALTHOUGH LOYAL AND DUTIFUL -- ARE THOROUGHLY UNHAPPY.
THEY HAVE THE HIGHEST SUICIDE RATE OF ANY GROUP IN ESTARCION. THEY ARE THE MOST APT TO ABUSE OR KILL THEIR CHILDREN. DAUGHTERS WHO ARE VICTIMS OF ABUSE ARE, MOST OFTEN, THE ONES WHO CHOOSE TO BECOME COMMUNAL SAFETY OFFICERS.
SERNA HAS WHAT YOU DESIRE MOST. SHE HAS CONQUERED ESTARCION ... SHE HAS THE UNQUESTIONING LOYALTY OF HER MILITARY UNDERLINGS.
SHE IS AN UNHAPPY PERSON WITH NEARLY LIMITLESS POWER.
SHE KEEPS CIRIN CLOSE BY. IT WAS MANY YEARS -- NOT UNTIL SHE HAD CONQUERED IEST -- BEFORE SHE WOULD CUT THE TWINE WHICH BOUND CIRIN'S LIPS, RIDING THE EMOTIONAL CREST OF HER GREATEST MILITARY VICTORY, SHE IS OVERCOME BY HER CURIOSITY.
WHAT WILL HER FORMER MENTOR SAY? TWO WORDS, WHISPERED, PAINFULLY THROUGH THE SCARRED AND ATROPHIED LIPS:
'I... UNDERSTAND.'

SERNA, ENRAGED, BEATS CIRIN INTO UNCONSCIOUSNESS. SHE DOES NOT, HOWEVER, HAVE CIRIN'S LIPS SEWN SHUT AGAIN. IT IS ONE OF THOSE DECISIONS A CREATION MAKES WHICH IS INEXPLICABLE EVEN TO HER (OR HIS) CREATOR...
INSTEAD A GUARD-STENOGRAPHER IS ASSIGNED. EACH NIGHT, A FULL TRANSCRIPT OF CIRIN'S WORDS IS BROUGHT TO SERNA
CIRIN RECITES POETRY FOR THE MOST PART, REMINISCES ABOUT THE EARLY DAYS OF THE MOVEMENT, ATTEMPTS TO ENGAGE THE GUARD-STENOGRAPHER IN CONVERSATION AND (REBUFFED) REMINISCES ABOUT HER FRIENDS AND THEIR CHILDREN
CREATORS CAN ONLY OBSERVE ACTIONS AND HEAR WORDS. WHAT GOES THROUGH SERNA'S MIND AS SHE PORES OVER THE TRANSCRIPTS? SHE OCCASIONALLY HURLS THEM AWAY FROM HER (BUT ALWAYS RETRIEVES THEM) AND OFTEN MUTTERS 'LIES' OR 'MADNESS' (BUT CONTINUES READING)
THE UNMISTAKABLE IMPRESSION I'M LEFT WITH IS THAT SHE HAS, INDEED, CONVINCED HERSELF THAT SHE IS CIRIN. HER PRODIGIOUS TELEPATHIC ABILITIES WERE TURNED INWARD AND REMOVED ALL MEMORY OF HER 'COUP' WHICH DID -- I CAN ASSURE YOU -- TAKE PLACE
EVEN AFTER THE REAL CIRIN HAD HER LITTLE 'CHAT' WITH YOU, SERNA DID NOT ORDER CIRIN'S LIPS RESEALED (AS I HAD EXPECTED SHE WOULD)
OF COURSE, ONCE I'VE RETURNED SERNA THE
KRAKUN
SORRY.
FORGOT WHO I WAS DEALING WITH HERE.
SKETCHA SKETCH

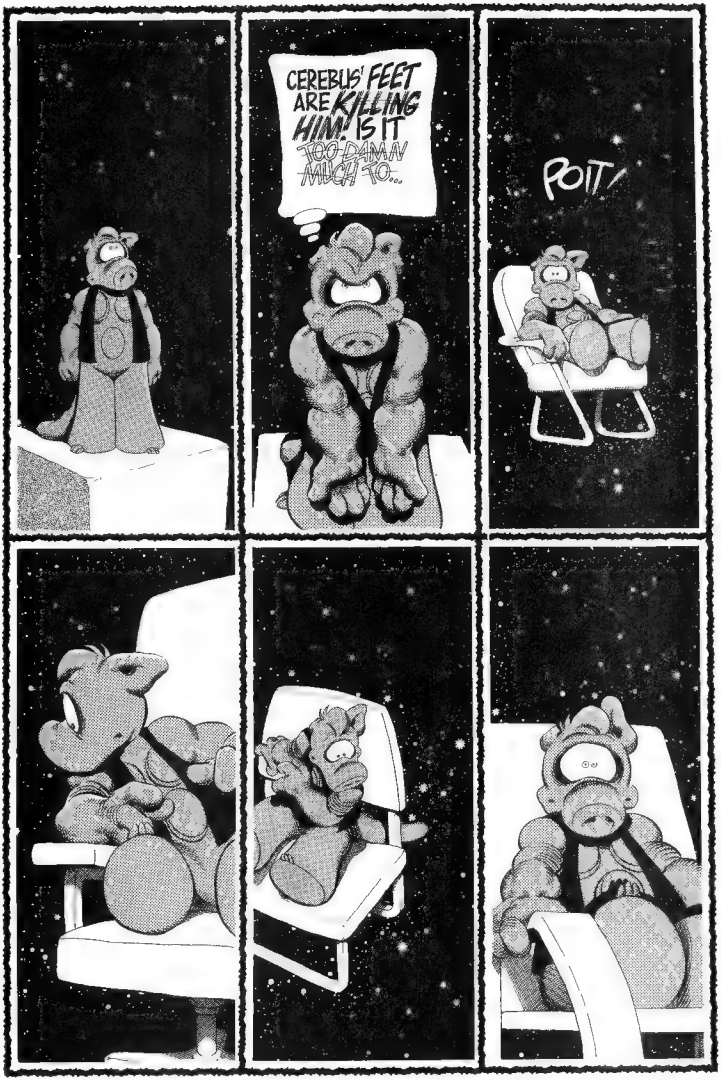

THE POINT I'M TRYING TO MAKE IS THAT CIRIN'S ORIGINAL MOVEMENT IS SOLID ENOUGH THAT IT WILL SURVIVE WHATEVER MILITARY ADVENTURE SERNA GRAFTS ONTO IT.
IT WILL STILL BE IN PLACE -- FLOURISHING -- LONG AFTER YOU'RE DEAD. YOU HAVEN'T A CHANCE OF CONQUERING IT. SO!
JAKA DOESN'T LOVE YOU 'THAT WAY'
AND YOUR DREAMS OF CONQUEST ARE JUST THAT -- DREAMS.
THERE IS A DANGER THAT SERNA MIGHT HUNT YOU DOWN AND KILL YOU, BUT ...
OH, HELL
LET ME TAKE CARE OF THAT RIGHT NOW.


PSST--
'CIRIN'

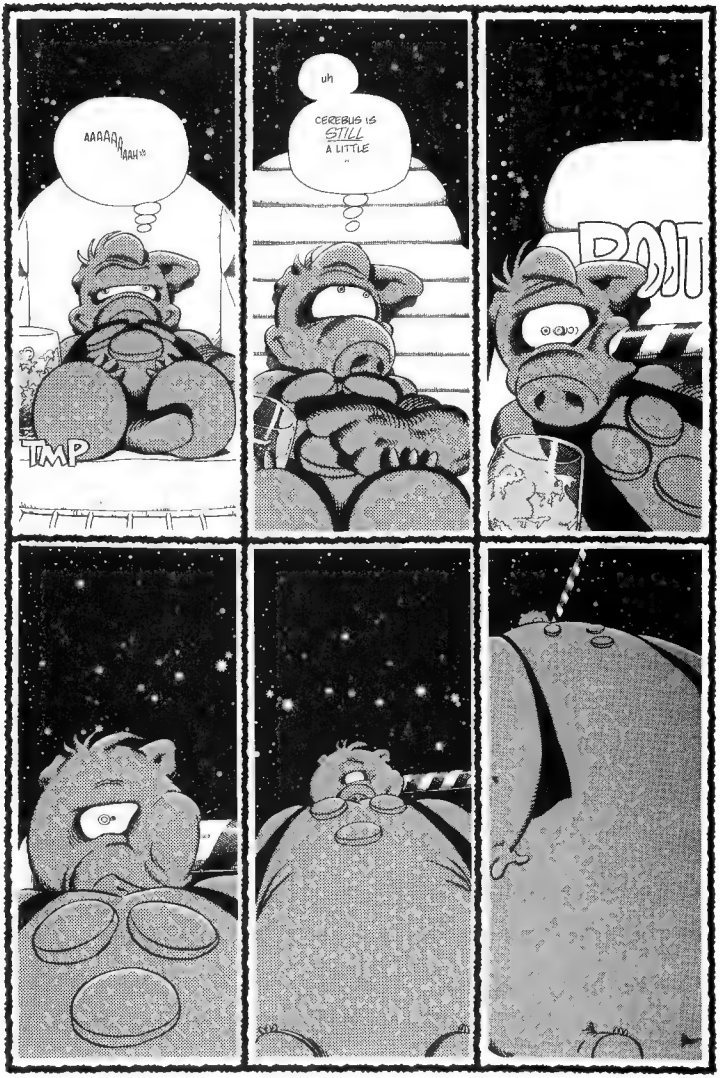


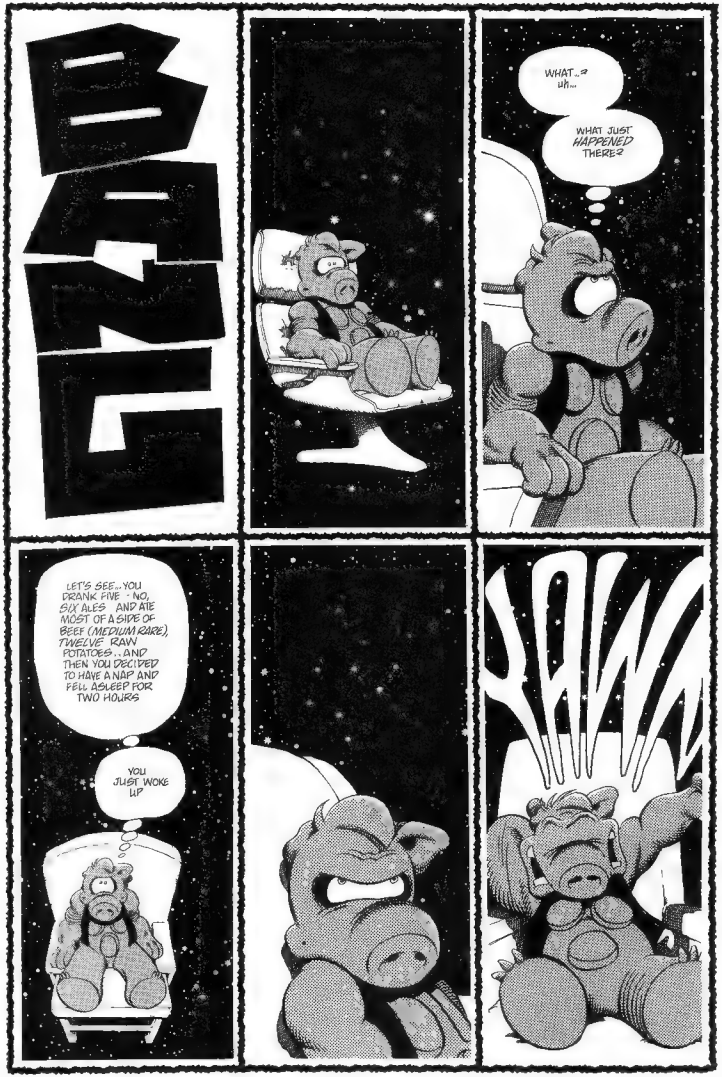

PRAISE BE!
GLORY TO SHE WHO
'IS CEREBUS CAPABLE OF GIVING BIRTH?'
THAT'S ALL SHE WANTED TO KNOW.
AND NOW SHE HAS HER ANSWER.
NO. HE ISN'T!

NOW THAT SHE KNOWS YOU CAN'T BE A MOTHER YOU NO LONGER EXIST AS FAR AS SHE'S CONCERNED...
SO...n THAT'S IT
I'M ALL DONE
YOUR TURN.

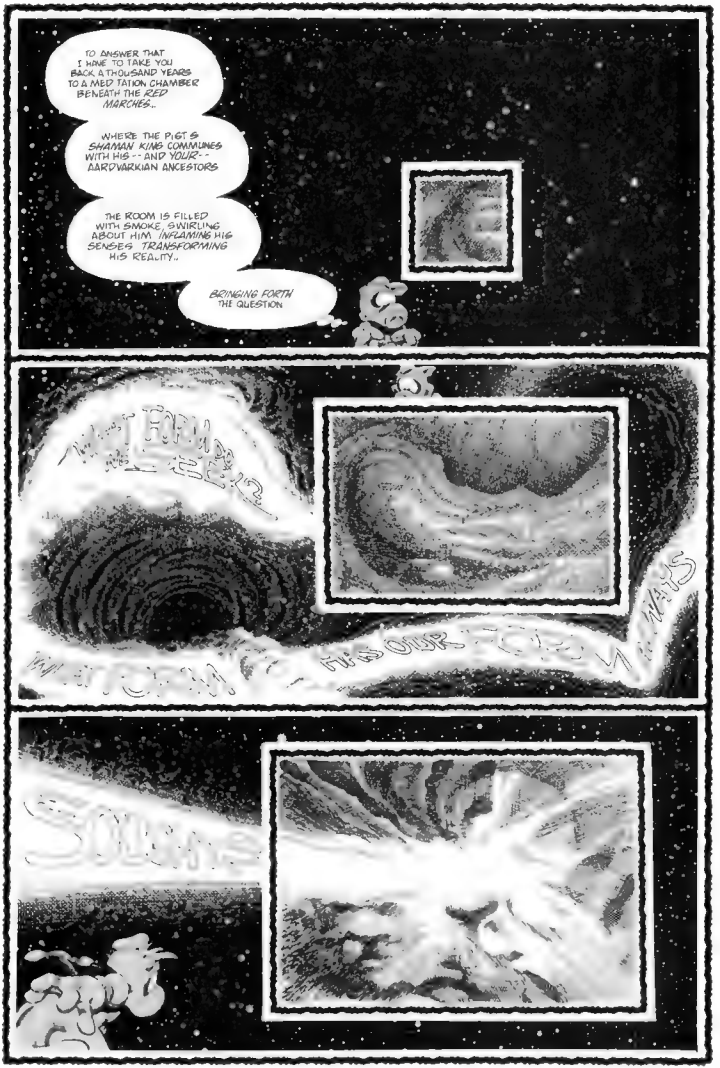

CEREBUS' FEET ARE KILLING HIM! IS IT TOO DAMN MUCH TO...
POIT!

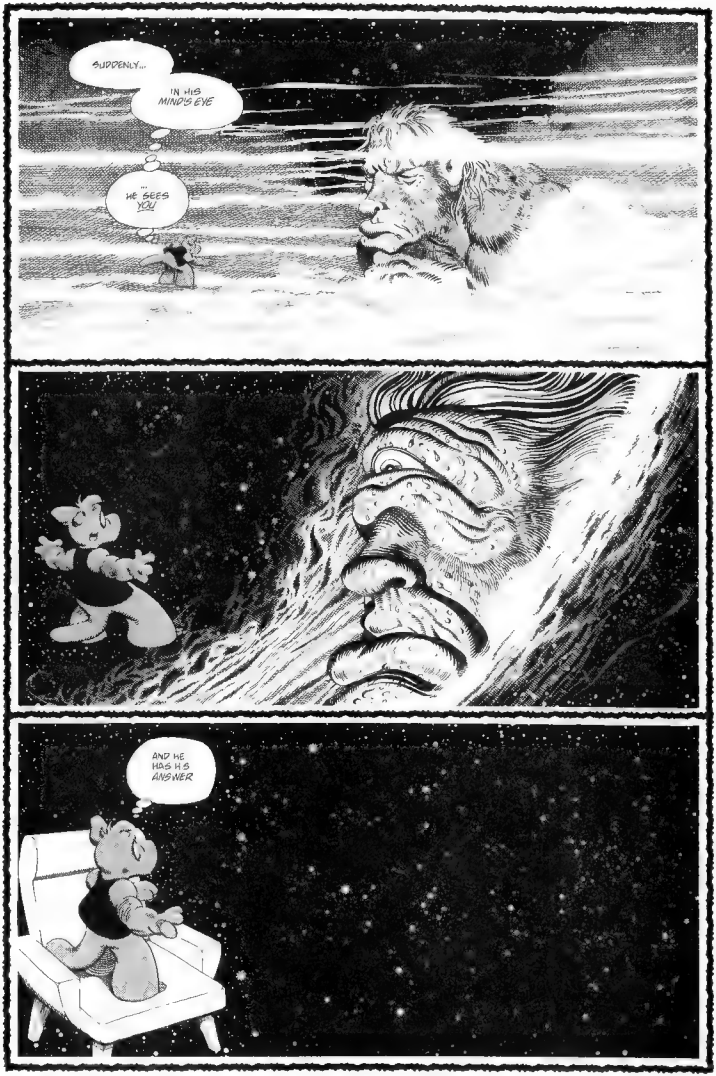
CEREBUS IS ALSO A LITTLE...
uh...
POT
GA LUK
GA LUK GA LUK
GA LUK!
GLUK!
GLUK!
GLUK
GLUK


AAAAAAAAAH!!
TMP
UH
CEREBUS IS STILL A LITTLE
..
DOIT


WHAT...? UH...
WHAT JUST HAPPENED THERE?
LET'S SEE... YOU DRANK FIVE - NO, SIX ALES AND ATE MOST OF A SIDE OF BEEF (MEDIUM RARE), TWELVE RAW POTATOES... AND THEN YOU DECIDED TO HAVE A NAP AND FELL ASLEEP FOR TWO HOURS
YOU JUST WOKE UP
RAW

SKTCH SKTCH
BE-CH!
AND IT'S STILL YOUR TURN.
OH!
AYE
WHAT EXACTLY ARE THESE DAMN THINGS


TO ANSWER THAT I HAVE TO TAKE YOU BACK A THOUSAND YEARS TO A MEDITATION CHAMBER BENEATH THE RED MARCHES..
WHERE THE PIGT'S SHAMAN KING COMMUNES WITH HIS -- AND YOUR -- AARDVARKIAN ANCESTORS
THE ROOM IS FILLED WITH SMOKE, SWIRLING ABOUT HIM INFLAMING HIS SENSES TRANSFORMING HIS REALITY..
BRINGING FORTH THE QUESTION
THIS OUR FORM WAYS
SOUND


SUDDENLY...
IN HIS MIND'S EYE
... HE SEES YOU
AND HE HAS HIS ANSWER

I WISH EVERYBODY HAVE A DUCK

SPIRITS of INDEPENDENCE 1995

LOCAL LIAISONS:

JUNE 30, 1995
MANCHESTER, VERMONT
S.R. Bissette's
Journey into Fear
John Rovnak's Comics Route
Green Mountain
Village Shops
Rte. 7A Main St.,
Manchester Center, VT 05255

AUGUST 12, 1995
WILMETTE, ILLINOIS
Larry Marder,
Tales of the Beanworld
P.O. Box 664, Wilmette, IL 60091

SEPTEMBER 9, 1995
PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA
Don Simpson, *Bizarre Heroes*
P.O. Box 44326
Pittsburgh, PA 15205

OCTOBER 7, 1995
PHOENIX, ARIZONA
James Owen, *Starchild*
P.O. Box 40904, Mesa, AZ 85274

DECEMBER 3, 1995
KITCHENER, ONTARIO
Dave Sim, *Cerebus*
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CANADA N2G 4R2

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AARDVARK COMMENT

P.O. BOX 1674, STATION 'C', KITCHENER, ONTARIO N2G 4R2

Hey, Everyone!

Yes, "*Cerebus* Girl" is back! However, this time I carry with me a story of heartbreak also. I figured my journal was gettin' bored of my endless tragedies, so why not have all you readers out there be mercilessly bewildered and entertained? As you will remember, I made a pretty good argument for the "yes, the opposite sex can be friends" issue. I still believe it. But what happens when events snowball around a relationship, leaving both partners confused and angered? Let me clarify. During this school year, I became good friends with the "Beatnik Cherub". Whenever we went out on adventures with the other members of our cast (which include "Ms. America", "IKONA", and various others), her bro, who is in my grade, came also. I'll call him "Sweetmeat"; oh, hold on! Asshole bro from hell! Hey, why is he bein' abnormally nice? We'll worry 'bout that later. Anyway, so me and "Sweetmeat" started to talk and hang out in school. I stole hall passes and since he had a main hallway locker, he was my partner in crime. Enter in "Bran Flakes". A fellow bus prisoner. We all stay after one day, and later on she calls. "Man, he likes you. It's so obvious!" I chuckle it off, but the seed had been planted. So, I study how we relate (this goes on for 'bout five days) then decide to tell the Beatnik Cherub my feeling for her bro. Yeah, I liked him. But in what way did he like me? She asked, and he said yeah, he did, and that he would probably ask me out in 'bout a month. Argh. Gotta flip sides on my Sebadoh tape. Anyway, so this Cheshire Kat (nicknamed cause of my big smile) goes on like usual. Yet Sweetmeat doesn't. He acts... well, he acts downright weird, folks. Avoids eye contact, clams up... get the pic? Everyone reassures, sayin' he's just shy. So I believed. But this drags on for two, three weeks. It's gettin' ridiculous. Even Bran Flakes, who's in his computer class, is e-mailing him questions 'bout me. So, what made this Cheshire Kat feel like roadkill? I skipped gym on 2/9/95 and went to the library to write e-mail. I went and decided to check Bran Flakes' messages, to see if Sweetmeat wrote anything revealing. Oh, he did, all right. Of how he only likes me as a friend, that he said he'd ask me out only to get Beatnik Cherub off his back, and he never thought she'd tell me exactly what he said. Readers, when I read this, my heart shattered Lies. Of the past weeks, hoping, dreaming, wondering, and worrying why he was acting strange — all for absolutely nothing. I gave my heart and he tossed it over his shoulder for good luck. I never thought I'd be upset over a guy wanting to be friends, yet here I am. It's the fact I wasted my time pining away for something that was never gonna happen that pissed *me* off! And you all know what happens when I get pissed... I wrote him a mean letter. I think Satan implanted ideas in my head the entire time I was writin' it. It was pretty long and hateful. But I thought "eye for eye, hurt for hurt". It kinda backfired. He wrote back, sayin', "You shouldn't trust everything you hear." Uh, excuse me? You mean to tell me that I shouldn't trust your sis and one of my closest friends? *You* shoulda had the balls to say the truth in the first place. Ah, exasperation city. I wrote back three computer screens to both Beatnik Cherub and Sweetmeat. I started crying in the middle of writing it. Did ya hear that one? They made *me*, a tuff and happy cookie, crumble and cry. Now Bran Flakes feels guilty for having ever started it, Beatnik Cherub thinks I hate her, and who even *knows* what the hell is goin' on in Sweetmeat's head? So, here I am. I realize he probably said he liked me in "that way" to not hurt my feelings, but didn't he stop to think that he hurt me worse that way? Did he lead me on? Hell, yeah. Will we ever be "friends" again? If time allows. Am I scarred for life? Unfortunately, yes. Hey, all you pen pals out there that are feelin' neglected — that's why I haven't been writin' to ya. This is what each letter woulda resembled. Misery, unexplainable feelings of betrayal and resentments, and chaotic thoughts.

Not what one wants to read smilin' over a cup of coffee, but is expected in the *Cerebus* letters pages. Moral of this story: Guys (and chickies), tell the truth, however harsh it may be, from the very beginning. Even a li'l white lie can be blown outta proportion. All this so close to Valentine's Day. This sucks. Ah, well. This chickie is gonna live on, and a smile is gonna be plastered to my face. Have a nice day, night, and life, to anyone still reading this. Oh... and to the Cortis, keep this to yourselves, OK? Sheesh.

Bonnie Raven Gerepka
376 Stagecoach Road
Freehold, NJ
USA 07728

P.S. *Cerebus* is supremely tastee, as usual.

Well, you and his sister sort of attempted to take the whole thing out of his hands, didn't you? And "Bran Flakes" into the bargain. There's a very good reason that men don't discuss their relationships with each other. All you have to do is look at the results women get with all their intrigue and conspiracy and manipulation. Boom. It blows up in their faces every time — usually sooner rather than later. Lots of tears, recrimination and hurt feelings. If emotion can't feed on reason, it will feed on itself.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dave/Ger:

Yesterday...

I had only been awake for 15 minutes. It was three in the afternoon.

"What the fuck is this?" she was screaming, waving the letter. I just sat there with my beer.

"You lying, fucking piece of shit! Everything you ever said to me was all just shit! I've wasted the past two years of my life — this is my life!"

I walked over to her. Her eyes were retreating — she was hitting me as hard as she could — cheeks, ears, temples. I cocked back. She backed off. "Get the fuck out of here, bitch!"

"You're just a stupid, frightened little boy," she spat, and knocked over a bookshelf for emphasis. A cascade of books spilled the beer over. She stormed to her car, yelling something about not ever calling her again.

I walked to the crusty fridge and got out a half-empty pint of Jack Daniel's and some wine. I lit a cigarette and poured a glass of wine. The door was still open and offered a view outside — it was a beautiful day. I took a hit off the pint and, well, you remember the issue — "first you whiskey, then you pisskey..." — I couldn't stop laughing for the next two minutes.

Max Bareither
on a Greyhound somewhere
between Gary and Chicago

That's the great thing about buses. There's always another one coming along.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

I'd like to share a story with you. It's a story that for me perfectly illustrates why self-publishing *will* continue to grow and flourish, and also why it *should*.

I'd bought the first three issues of a B&W comic, *Kane*, self-published out of England by a talented guy, Paul Grist. (It's a terrific book, and I'd thoroughly recommend it.) There was a big gap after #3 came out. I waited and waited and, having envisioned an untimely demise, was pleased to see a new *Kane* on the shelf at Queensboro Comics in Reco Park, NY (yeah, it's a shameless plug, but they're good guys, y'know?). Anyway, what they had was *Kane* #5. Somehow #4 just hadn't made it to USA or something, so I took Mr. Grist up on his back-issue offer (any single issue for $3.50 postpaid) and sent off a check the first week of January.

Couple of weeks later I get a copy of *Kane* #4 through the mail, plus my check back — it seems that I dated the check 1994 instead of 1995 (a common enough mistake this time of year). But Mr. Grist sent me the comic I ordered anyway. Apparently trusting me enough to send back a replacement. It's this sort of thing that almost restores my faith in human nature...

A simple act of faith that represents why self-publishing is the *right* way to bring out comic books.

Wishing you and your brothers-in-arms all the best.

Mark Burnell
58–17 84th Place
Elmhurst, NY
USA 11373

Same reason that we accept personal cheques. Same reason that the guiding principle for the admissions guy (or female-equivalent-of-guy) at the Spirits stops is to give people the benefit of the doubt. We've had personal cheques bounce and I'm sure a few people have gotten into the Spirits stops without paying. But I really think that it's better to treat people as if they're honest than to treat people as if they're all potential criminals. They'll usually live up (or down) to your expectations.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dave,

I have a theory (story). Once upon a time there was a storyteller (theorist). In his story (theory?) he laid out a theory (story). It stated that "All stories (theories) are true." Later in his story (theory?) and also outside of his story (letters page), he stated his personal belief that we should place reason ahead of emotion. Then in issue 186 he made the statement: "Even a story that says 'all stories are false' is true." The storyteller, being well aware of the fact (story element) that most theories' (stories') major downfall is that they are susceptible to a principle called the 'self-excepting fallacy', attempted to circumvent this problem by claiming that the theory (story) could overcome this problem. My theory (story) is that the storyteller (theorist) has either worked out an explanation as to how the theory (story) that "All stories are true" can accommodate this claim or he has realized that his theory (story) is full of shit and is trying to pass it off on us by claiming to know what he can't prove.

Dave, I like this theory and I agree with you that it can explain a lot. Since you claim that *Cerebus* is a work of thought (and I agree with that, too) and this theory seems to have become a re-occurring theme in *Cerebus*, at least recently, I would hope that you would help fans like me to understand how it can overcome this fundamental problem. For anyone non-philosophically inclined who might read this if it gets printed, the self-excepting fallacy is a fallacy where a claim applies to everything but itself.

In this case, if all stories are true, the story that all stories are false must also be true. If this theory is to be of any use, we should show

that this statement is not a contradiction. Dave, since you have obviously spent a long time thinking about this, I hope that you could explain to me (and the rest of the readers who might care) how you believe you can make sense of this. It seems to me that the answer is in the word 'story' and what we mean by it. If it is not too much of a problem, I would appreciate it if you would enlighten us with your thoughts on this. I hardly expect a definition of 'truth' or a major philosophical theory — just an idea of what you had in mind.

Speaking of stories, I ran across a short article in my local newspaper about a new study concerning the HIV virus. It was the first time I remember ever seeing infection rates given. Guess what they were. High, right? The new study just finished by the University of Michigan puts the rate for the first 60 days after contracting the virus as "extremely contagious", meaning that an unprotected person will contract the virus 3 out of every 10 sexual encounters. The disease then enters a long, less contagious phase where the chance drops to 3 out of every 1,000 (yes, that's one thousand) sexual encounters. Later, when the disease progresses to full AIDS, the contiguousness rises (to what, the article doesn't say). This disease is not something I would play games with, at any rate, but it certainly made me question some of the things that the mass media have been trying to force down our throats since the mid-eighties.

Reed Tate
998 Donald Way
Santa Maria, CA
USA 93455

P.S. On the "gender wars" issue, I come down pretty close to Mark Hayden Frazier's letter in #189. Also, I typed this up while listening to the Ass Pony's new CD "Electric Rock Music". I would encourage everyone to check it out.

Well, let me take your HIV 'story' as an example. If these are facts (not necessarily — I mean, who funded the study? What were they told to look for to maintain their funding?) and we add a 'story element' — there is a larger consciousness at work in nature and what it desires is implied by the way it works — what I would read into the 'story' is that DNA is 'green-lighting' any sexual act so long as you leave a period of sixty days between high-risk encounters. I have no doubt that the article doesn't specify the rise in contiguousness rate (if it's closer to 3 out of 1,000 than 3 out of 10, I'm sure a lot of gays would be willing to 'roll the dice').

If a gay male believed this and followed the sixty-day guideline and stayed healthy, the story would be true. If another gay male believed it and followed the guideline and got full-blown AIDS, the story would be false. True for one, false for the other. The story is true and false.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

I haven't written in a few years, so I thought I'd rectify that tonight, just to let you know that I'm still out here, still picking up *Cerebus* (well, I buy two copies every month, sending one to a friend in England, even though he makes more money than I do. Don't know why I still do that. Habit and friendship, I suppose), and still enjoying it. Like your life has been incomplete without me telling you this.

I've been reading *Cerebus* since #68. I found that issue the other day, just sitting on a pile of old Marvel *Star Wars* comics in my closet. It was (gasp!) not even in a bag! And, horrors upon horrors, the cover was bent! Dear God! How can I treat a comic like that? Why haven't I been struck down by a bolt of lightning? I can just imagine thousands of nervous comics readers simply passing out at such blasphemy, making protective X-signs in front of them.

So I sat down on the carpet and re-read it. The memories came back of the day I bought it, of how it was raining, how I thought it was a little expensive for the amount of time it took to read it, and of the sneer my then-girlfriend had when I showed it to her. Funny. I even remember that I read it in my girlfriend's living room, with a lamp on behind me, the rest of the bottom floor of the house dark.

Enough of that. I think I've already written my 'Introduction to *Cerebus*' letter to you, praising Bruno Andreacchi to high heaven for buying me coffee and explaining it all to me. Bruno's one of the good ones out there — he's one of the few comics retailers who don't treat you like shit, like they're passing out manna when you buy your books, or refuse to bathe, and blather on about their role-playing games all fucking day. Bruno told me about that party in your hotel room down in Dallas, and it just reminds me that I've never met you yet. That big party up at Pete's a few years ago I had to miss because I was in the hospital with ulcerative colitis (I'm trying to get this disease trademarked as the Generation X Disease of Choice, perfect for stressed-out people everywhere), and I never seem to make it to cons. Ah, well. One day. And on that day, I'll buy the first round.

So what else has happened in the past few years? I got married, and I can't really complain about that, or whine on endlessly about 'the bitch breaking my balls' like most other readers do. My theory about all the fucked-up relationships occurring these days is that in most cases people don't work on a relationship simply because they have no idea what a relationship is. Too many people try and build a relationship after they've blown their wad. They want to get laid, primarily, and then they do. Afterwards, they try to find something to talk about.

I remember sitting in a restaurant once and being forced to listen to some woman go on and on to her friend about this guy she'd just met. About how she wondered if he really was good for her, and did she really have a good time with him, and how did he feel about this or that. I sat there, just thinking to myself, "Well, go TALK to him, you moron! Find out!" And not once did I hear the mention of love or affection. It was all analysis. There was nothing heartfelt about it, no warmth of emotion. It was like she was buying a car, or buying a toilet freshener.

And, sorry as I am to disappoint all the misogynists out there, it's not just women. It's men, too. How many times have I been forced to listen to friends bitch about how they've just discovered that they have nothing in common with their wives. Like they've just discovered this after five years of marriage? And why is that? Because people don't talk. They may chatter to each other, but they don't talk. They don't know how to talk to themselves, let alone someone else. They fuck their partners, fantasizing that they're with some airhead from *Melrose Place*, go home and switch on the TV, and then

wonder why they feel like shit.

Too many people don't make love; they feign it.

And then there are the Career Relationships, where the only considerations are bank accounts or how that person looks on the end of an arm. Marrying Well Because It's What You Do. People like that, well, they deserve what they get. And there's more of that going on these days, especially with the supposedly higher-educated types, than you would think.

But, then, what the hell do I know? I think all I've done is add to the static surrounding this rather tired debate. My idea of a fun night is two Newcastles and a Dr. Who novel, so I obviously have no life, so obviously my opinions are worthless. But if people took the time to learn who they are, what they want and like, then maybe they'd attract just whom they're looking for. Try to believe in a limited form of romance, which is not sunsets and flowers, but being there when someone needs you, of keeping a home together, and despite all the bullshit and pain flying around these days, try to remember how to love and grow.

Like I said, what do I know?

I can see that sneer on your face, Dave. That's all right. We're different. But I still enjoy *Cerebus*, and if we ever meet, I'll still buy the first round.

I'll try to write again soon with more blatherings.

Sean Twist
216-500 Springbank
London, Ontario
N6J 2Y9

Well, I wouldn't say my life was 'incomplete' without hearing it, but given that there are a lot of transitory *Cerebus* fans (it's a bit much to expect everyone to stay glued to their seats for twenty-six years), it's always nice to hear from someone who's sticking it out this long.

And that's not me sneering at you, Sean; that's my Viktor Davis personality. Don't worry, he sneers at my other personalities a lot of the time, too.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Mr. Sim,

I'm getting right near fifty years ol'... bin married once before and the nineteen-year-old son from that marriage and I have had *Cerebus* to talk about. He asked me about seven years ago why I didn't get *Cerebus* when I got this other stuff, and since I couldn't give a good answer...I started buying *Cerebus* each month. We have enjoyed it all the time.

Neither of us was thrilled with *Reads* since it is the art... visual art, that is... that draws (geeze, is that a pun?) us to the story. We've enjoyed the way you have poked fun at the comics industry and we also read your less abstract comments about the industry. You make sense. So we read *Reads* when we would rather have flowed along with the graphics.

I read the whole thing first. I remember telling my son on the phone that Dave Sim was doing something really unusual, and outlined the ideas in the story line. It never occurred to me that you might actually believe that men were superior to women. I could not feature someone with your obvious talents believing such utter crap. I REALLY enjoy your work, and to find out that Dave Sim believed women were the cause of all bad things just didn't compute. My son was just as fuzzled.

My assumption was that your character believed this... not you. So, then the *Comics Journal* came in the mail. Well, the *Journal* sometimes overreacts but still... they made some good points. And, except for a shrill tone sometimes, I really look forward to the *Journal*.

My first marriage was unpleasant for the last few years and I could see parallels in *Reads* that bothered me. Even so, I would not condemn all women because I don't care for one, or a dozen, for that matter. I taught Jr. High for ten years but I wouldn't execute all Jr. High kids. Hell, I could see letting 10% live. That would solve the superhero comics situation, wouldn't it?

I don't intend to tell you how to believe. I don't plan on boycotting *Cerebus*. But I've got to tell you, I sure hope you DON'T believe that women, in general, are a drag on society. If you DO hate women, or some women, or feminists, it would do you good to practice some forgiveness... for your sake and the sake of a damn fine comic.

'Nuther Topic... it is nigh unto impossible to get independent comics here in Fayetteville. It is too bad that there isn't a catalogue of independent comics, with examples of the art and general story line. You do a nice job with your Previews but that's not enough. Most of those you have featured on your World Tour covers, I've never seen... not once.

Have really enjoyed going with the flow in recent issues. And, by the way, your method of lettering/emphasizing/whatever is really creative and almost always makes sense. Also, I enjoyed *World Tour Book*... especially the Barry Windsor-Smith and Chester Brown stuff.

Thanks,

Daniel Costar
3481 Sandpiper
Fayetteville, AR
USA 72704

I think it's a misapprehension to interpret what I was saying as 'men are superior to women' (of course, 'all stories are true', so if that's how you read it, to you, that's what I was saying). I definitely think reason is superior to emotion. I think you have to work very hard to nurture reason if you want to keep your emotions in check. Where emotion supersedes reason, I think it is impossible to make much progress — either as a society or an individual. A lot of people don't think that way. A majority don't feel that way. People make choices. I can't see where it is my place either to condemn or forgive them for their choices. But I also can't see why I shouldn't be able to identify where I think society has gone wrong in light of the extensive writings out there that have singled out men as the problem (and the evidently universal acceptance of that as a valid viewpoint).

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave:

1. I liked the text bits in *Cerebus* over the last couple of years very much, and one thing I really enjoyed was what you had to say about the dangers of over-population, which I totally agree with. (If anyone's interested, Isaac Asimov has a couple of good essays about this subject in a book called *The Roving Mind*.)

   Anyhow, I was watching CNN last month and something reminded me of some things you had said. It seems what they do is bring you the latest updates on how nightmarish life on Earth has become, and then

wind up the half-hour with a 'kicker' story, something light and cheery. On this particular day, after showing us what life is really like in a Bosnian rape camp, they brought us five minutes with… the wife of Sting, boring, annoying, pretentious Rock Star. Apparently she had done something to make herself newsworthy in her own right — whether she had bought a Fabergé egg or invented a new perfume fragrance, I really can't remember. So we're getting a tour of the insanely huge mansion where Sting and his wife live, and we cut to some action footage of Sting's wife chopping up scallions and zucchini in the kitchen, as if preparing dinner in front of strangers, cameras, and bright lights was something she was used to doing. Dividing her eye contact between her off-screen interviewer and the camera, she told us, me, the world, the interviewer, the camera? that she and (environmentalist) Sting have four kids and plan to have two more. And then she giggled and said, "I know it isn't very environmentally friendly, but sod it! I LIKE having children!"

Wow! She knows! She said she KNOWS we're dangerously overpopulated, but that knowledge is overridden by the desire to do what she likes! There you go, eh? But who are we to tell her what to do? She can do whatever she wants. That's what freedom's all about, doing whatever you like, I guess. I just thought you might like that; it seemed to illustrate that Emotion vs. Thought stuff you were talking about.

2. I just bought a comic called *Star Reach Classics* #5 (for a quarter!) which featured a story you had written called 'I'm God'. It was interesting. The idea of taking the metaphor of Man and Technology pushing God out of their way, and making it literal, letting it physically happen, was a pretty good one.
3. I hope the next instalment of *From Hell* comes out soon.

Have a good day.

Darrell Epp
11 Parklane Crescent
St. Catharines, Ontario
L2T 3T9

P.S. If Kevin Aiello reads this, write me sometime!

1. P.J. O'Rourke also deals pretty extensively with the subject of overpopulation in his most recent book (don't have the title handy), absolutely ripping to shreds the idea that the world is overpopulated. Very persuasive and very, very funny. Highly recommended.

2. Thanks. Not bad for a twenty-year-old, eh?

3. Hey, me too. I also can't wait to find out whom Disney hires to do the comics adaptation of the movie now that Alan and Eddie have sold all of their rights to it.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Yesterday I sat down and read the whole of *Reads*. I have had the issues for some time now, but had not bothered to read the text carefully. You see, I was really interested in the plot, so I gave it the quick skim treatment as they came out. I figured it would read better in one sitting. I was right.

I had written a lengthy defense of your position, but I discarded it after some reflection. I figured that it was redundant — you are obviously more than capable of defending yourself. I do have a few general comments about *Reads* that I will now pass on. I think that on the whole the text is too long. The points that you make are kind of taken to excess. The whole of *Reads*, I think, can be summed up by one line used in issue #186: "It's tough to play a game when you don't know what board you're on or what the rules are." And that line neatly sums up all the preceding text of *Reads* — for all of the aspects of Viktor Davis.

The points that you made about creativity, business and relationships are all rather self-evident — if you take the time to think about them. Despite what the powers-that-be would like us to think, things are as you say. It really is a case of the Emperor's New Clothes. Woe to he that dares to speak out.

My points being made, I would like to compliment you on the present story line. It is great to see the young Cerebus again. He is my favourite incarnation of the character — show some more. Also, the *Tour Book* was a nice touch. Now if only you would put out a colour special with the *Epic* stories…

Best,

Terry Stewart
Box 372
Lashburn, Saskatchewan
S0M 1H0

I would agree (and I thought several times during the writing of 186) that this really shouldn't be necessary. But, then, I'm sure there were a lot of German writers in the late 1930s who typed 'Jews are human beings' and then sat staring at their typewriters for an hour and a half wondering what they could possibly add to it.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Is 192 the return of "the glowing white strange thing"?

The Fountainhead is not entirely typical of Ayn Rand's novels. If the interpretations of it you came across did not seem to fit the novel you read, that is likely because it had been interpreted in view of her greater work — not an unreasonable project. The reason people have associated your work with Rand's is fairly simple. In your past work (issues of *Cerebus*), you have advocated what may be a somewhat libertarian perspective (or at least apparently advocated). Ayn Rand advocated explicitly a form of libertarianism. To her followers, she was THE libertarian advocate. Consequently, you must either have been influenced by her or should be exposed to her influence (perhaps to iron out the points where you diverge?). Nevertheless, the reason a writer in a current issue of *The Comics Journal* proposed that *Mothers & Daughters* was some sort of satire of Randian philosophy is quite beyond me, even given what I have said.

I am also puzzled by J. Hagey's invocation of Wittgenstein, Russell, the logical positivists, and Sartre. At the very least the positivists did not seek to revive metaphysics but to bury it. They may or may not have succeeded. Very possibly one may posit a positivist argument against the metaphysics which you proposed in *Reads*. However, that argument is not given in J. Hagey's letter nor even alluded to. I do think there is a relation between scholarship and insight. Many of our arguments depend on background assumptions which we so take for granted that they become translucent to us. Scholarship can reveal the historical background of our assumptions (this is Foucault's

project) and this can lead us to new insights. However, scholarship is not sufficient for insight (one can be a scholar and have no ideas at all) nor is it necessary for insight (one can have ideas while not doing any scholarship).

To say "the death of philosophy implies there is almost no reason to communicate novel ideas" seems to assume either that all ideas are philosophical ideas (only true in the most trivial sense that one can philosophize about anything) or that we acquire our worth in expressing ideas from philosophers, which is a ludicrous assertion. If anything, the causal link is the opposite direction: philosophy (dead or not) acquires what worth it has from the intrinsic human desire to know, which predates Plato and can be seen as well in science and in other arts.

Many opinions on other people's thoughts have been sent to Aardvark Comment, and this letter contains just a few more. Ciao.

Mikel Norwitz
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London NW1 8AN
UK

Hey, fella, that's just *your* opinion (sorry, couldn't resist). Labelling seems to me to pose the greatest danger, having a lot in common with the omnibus bills presented to the legislatures of the G-7 countries. Massive packages containing the good, the bad and the ugly, and no option besides voting 'yes' or 'no'. When Gary Groth asked me in one of the *Journal* interviews if I was an Objectivist, I had to resist the impulse to say (Chico style), 'Shoo, boss, I object to a lotta t'ings'.

★★★★★★★★★★

1995 CEREBUS WORLD TOUR

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Kansas City stop scheduled for November 4 has been cancelled. Richard Corben's FANTAGOR PRESS is on hiatus. Refund cheques for exhibitors are being mailed this month.

★★★★★★★★★★

1996 CEREBUS WORLD TOUR

ANNOUNCEMENT

Owing to the success of the SPIRITS OF INDEPENDENCE events, these will be carried forward into 1996 — limiting our participation on the international scene to those countries where self-publishing is strong enough to warrant the trip:

AUSTRALIA:

'The Happy Birthday, Bacchus Tour' with Eddie Campbell, including OZCON '96

ENGLAND:

SPIRITS OF INDEPENDENCE in Nottingham in association with PAGE 45

QUEBEC:

SPIRITS OF INDEPENDENCE in Montreal in association with Librairie Nebula

and various locations in and around Canada and the United States.

★★★★★★★★★★

STAY TUNED TO *CEREBUS* AFTER ISSUE 200 FOR FURTHER DETAILS.

Just saw Steve Lafler last week at the Seattle stop. I've met him before at big California cons but always in passing (the big-California-con experience). Diamond sent him a letter saying that they might stop carrying *Bughouse* if the book's circulation drops any further. Now, I'm not one of those guys who goes ballistic over these kinds of decisions. Diamond is in a lot of turmoil right now and it's always hard with a large organization to come up with ANY kind of policy that isn't going to hurt SOMEone. But I'd really hate to see *Bughouse* cut off.

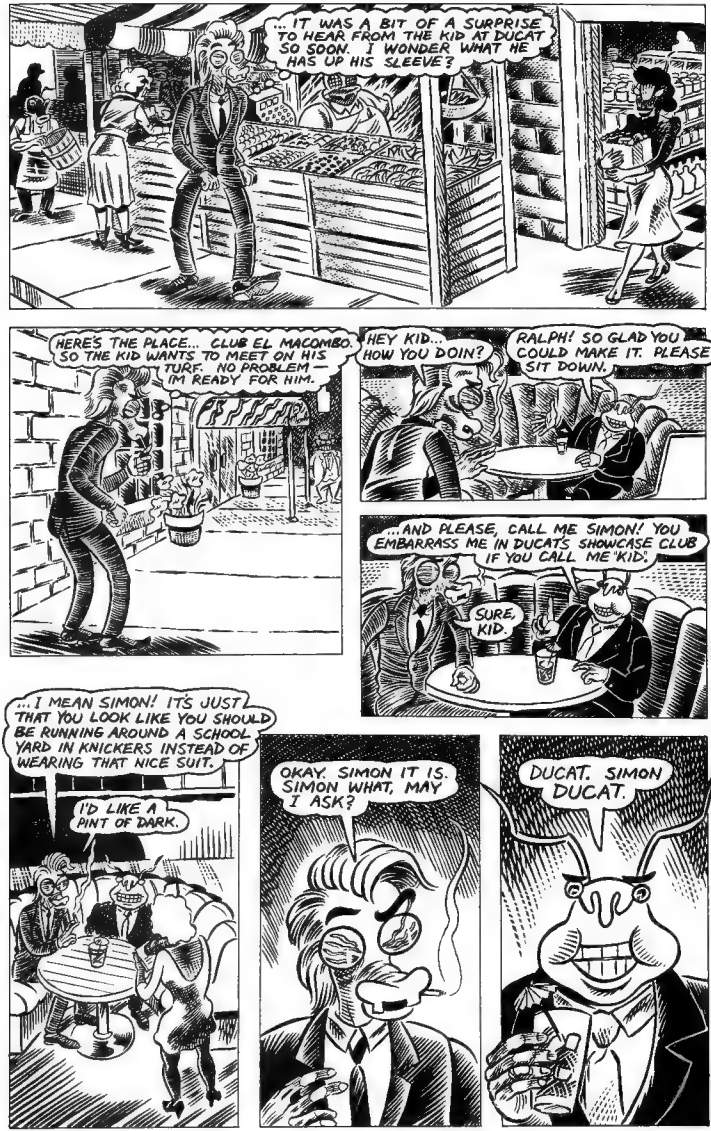
All of the characters are various kinds of insects and the allegory is VERY suited to the subject matter. On the surface of it, the story is about Jimmy Watts, a saxophone player who is his own worst enemy when it comes to 'bug juice', and his ongoing struggle to get on top of his addiction and the effect his weakness has on those around him. Lafler doesn't overplay his hand in this regard. The *Bughouse* players all evince a certain hardness in their characters at various points in the story, a 'have not' kind of hardness which is that much more effective because of the subtlety with which it is portrayed. A lot of it constitutes a grasping for power — any kind of power — among the powerless. The histrionics and the melodrama are kept to a minimum. Take the sequence I've reprinted here (pages 13 through 20 of issue 2): Jimmy's been clean and shows up home 'fucked up'. Lafler establishes the point and moves on. The next time we see Jimmy and Julie, we have no idea what transpired between them after the point had been established — which only reinforces and increases the internal tension of the story. Did Julie blow up at him? Did they have a screaming argument? We don't know. All we can do is speculate. But we know the situation that exists (musician boyfriend falling back into his bad habit and his girlfriend who knows what that means) the next time we see them. And now the Man Who Would Be Agent, Ralph, introduces a ten-thousand-dollar cheque into the proceedings: a ticking time bomb.

Beautiful.

It's a self-contained story — a couple of hundred pages or so. Steve knows where he's going with it and I'm definitely along for the ride. The book doesn't come out that regularly, but it doesn't come out that irregularly either. The mark of greatness (to me) is that I can pick up right where I left off a couple of months back and know EXACTLY who everyone is. With the number of comic books I read that come in through Box 1674 in the average month, that's really saying something.

For retailers, *Bughouse* reorders are available from Last Gasp at (415) 824-6636 (if you've never ordered from Last Gasp it's definitely worth your while to get a copy of their catalogue). Individual issues are available from Cat-Head Comics, P.O. Box 576, Hudson, MA, 01749 for $2.50 U.S. postage paid.

Whatever you can do to help would be very much appreciated. By Steve, sure, but more importantly by ME, 'cause I HAVE to find out how the story ends.


... IT WAS A BIT OF A SURPRISE TO HEAR FROM THE KID AT DUCAT SO SOON. I WONDER WHAT HE HAS UP HIS SLEEVE?
HERE'S THE PLACE... CLUB EL MACOMBO. SO THE KID WANTS TO MEET ON HIS TURF. NO PROBLEM — IM READY FOR HIM.
HEY KID.. HOW YOU DOIN?
RALPH! SO GLAD YOU COULD MAKE IT. PLEASE SIT DOWN.
...AND PLEASE, CALL ME SIMON! YOU EMBARRASS ME IN DUCATS SHOWCASE CLUB IF YOU CALL ME 'KID'.
SURE, KID.
...I MEAN SIMON! ITS JUST THAT YOU LOOK LIKE YOU SHOULD BE RUNNING AROUND A SCHOOL YARD IN KNICKERS INSTEAD OF WEARING THAT NICE SUIT.
I'D LIKE A PINT OF DARK.
OKAY. SIMON IT IS. SIMON WHAT, MAY I ASK?
DUCAT. SIMON DUCAT.

NO SHIT. INNA FAMILY, SO TO SPEAK.
YEAH. THE OLD MAN'S MY UNCLE.
SIMON, IM GOING TO GIVE IT TO YOU STRAIGHT UP. ME 'N JIMMY DONT LIKE SOME OF THE LANGUAGE IN YOUR OFFER, LIKE I SAID BEFORE. OUR FUTURE WILL BE MADE OUT OF THAT LANGUAGE, AND WE WANT TO GET IT JUST RIGHT.
I SEE...
LOOK RALPH, THE OLD MAN THINKS IM JUST A DUMB GREENHORN, BUT I DID PICK UP ONE THING FROM HIM. HE BUILT DUCAT INTO A FORCE BY SIGNING THE BEST TALENT. AND I INTEND TO CONTINUE THAT TRADITION.
SO YOU NAME YOUR NUMBERS AND I'LL GO TO BAT FOR YOU WITH THE OLD BOY. IF WE GET OFF ON THE RIGHT FOOT, THIS COULD BE THE START OF A LONG, LUCRATIVE RELATIONSHIP.
SIMON, MAYBE YOURE NOT QUITE AS DUMB AS YOUR UNCLE THINKS.
YEAH, WELL THAT BRINGS ME TO MY NEXT POINT: JIMMY WATTS. HE'S GOT IT? YOU KNOW IT, I KNOW IT, HE KNOWS IT. PROBLEM IS, HE CANT USE IT IF HES SICK. OR DEAD.
TRUE, TRUE..
JIMMY AND I ARE TIGHT. WERE PARTNERS... WE HELP EACH OTHER A LOT. I DO EVERYTHING I CAN FOR JIMMY, BUT ULTIMATELY HE HAS TO SAVE HIS OWN ASS. I JUST HOPE HE CAN.
FAIR ENOUGH. I HOPE HE CAN TOO. NOW ARE YOU READY TO TALK TURKEY?
GEE SIMON, ID LIKE TO HEAR THE NUMBERS YOU HAVE IN MIND FIRST...
OH, BUT SURELY..

SOME FIFTY MINUTES AND TWO DRINKS LATER...
OKAY RALPH, I THINK I CAN GET THIS BY MY UNCLE. I'LL GIVE YOU A RING IN A DAY OR TWO WITH A CONTRACT TO SIGN.
COOLSVILLE, DADDY-O.
WE'RE ABOUT TO BLOW INTO REHEARSING SO WE'LL BE READY TO GET IN THE STUDIO AND BLOW.
UNTIL THEN MR. ROJAS.
CLICK!
ONE THING'S FOR DAMN SURE... I CAN'T WAIT TO GET MY HANDS ON THAT ADVANCE.
IT'S NOT THAT I DISLIKE RICE AND BEANS EVERY NIGHT...
I JUST WOULDN'T MIND A STEAK & SHRIMP BURRITO FOR A CHANGE.
WELL... RALPH ROJAS! FUNNY RUNNING INTO YOU HERE.
PUTTER! FUNNY MY ASS... YOU'VE BEEN SHADOWIN' ME, YOU PRICK!

FOR CHRISSAKES PUTTER, CANT YOU THINK OF ANYTHING MORE IMPORTANT TO DO THAN BUG POOR MUSICIANS?
RALPHIE- I THOUGHT WE WAS PALS!
LISTEN, WHY DON'T YOU LET ME BUY YOU A DRINK?
THROW IN A ROAST BEEF SANDWICH AND YOU GOT A DEAL.
HOW ABOUT A COUPLE OF THOSE HALIBUT STEAKS... THEY LOOK GREAT.
IT'S SUCH A PLEASURE TO COOK AGAIN SINCE JIMMY'S BEEN CLEAN.
I OUGHTA GIT GOIN' SLIM... JULIE'S COOKIN' A FISH FRY T'NIGHT!
HA-HA-HA-HA-HA!
SURE.
HEH HEH HEH...
FISH!
UH... HI BABY.
OH SHIT.

JIMMY WATTS! YOU FUCKED UP!
SHEEX! HOWD YA KNOW?
JESUS RALPH, WHY DONT YOU JUST INHALE THE DAMN SANDWICH?
CHOMP CHOMP CHOMP
IM TRYING PUTTER!
SO LISTEN, IVE GOT A TIDBIT YOU MIGHT WANT TO PASS ON TO YOUR PAL JIMMY— BIG MEAN TURNER IS BACK IN TOWN.
I SEE. AND YOURE TELLING ME THIS SO JIMMY CAN GO RUNNING TO HIM TO SCORE BUG JUICE,,,
NOT QUITE. FACT IS, BIG MEAN IS MAD AS HELL AT JIMMY, BLAMES HIM FOR BRINGING THE HEAT DOWN ON HIM. AS IF WE WOULDNT BE ALL OVER HIS ASS ANYWAY!
THE WORD ON THE STREET IS HE SAYS HE'S GOING TO SETTLE THE SCORE. MATTER OF PRIDE, REPUTATION.
NOT GOOD... FORTUNATELY, JIMMYS BEEN CLEAN SINCE HE WAS SHOT. BUT I WONDER HOW LONG THAT CAN LAST..
IM SURPRISED THAT HES HELD OUT THIS LONG.
SPEAKIN' OF WHICH, HAVE YOU CONFISCATED ANY GOOD REEFER BUDS LATELY?

GEEZIS! KEEP IT DOWN YOU ASSHOLE! YOU TRYING TO GET ME BUSTED BACK TO BEAT COP?
HAW HAW HAW! I FIGURE YOU'LL BRING THAT ON YOURSELF FOR BEING A LUSH...

SOON...
I'LL HAVE YOU KNOW DIDN'T CONFISCATE THIS EITHER. IT WAS A GIFT FROM SAMMY THE SNAKE!
WHEW... WHAT A RELIEF! I'D HATE TO THINK YOU'RE CORRUPT.

NEXT DAY...
RING RING RING

HELLO? OH, HI RALPHIE. WHAT'S UP?
UH-HUH. UH-HUH. REALLY? YOU SIGNED IT?

THE ADVANCE IS WHAT?!?

HEY MOMMA!
BONES? YOU THERE?

YOU STILL THERE? GEEZ, THANKS FOR FIXING MY HEARING! LISTEN, CAN YOU MAKE A REHEARSAL THIS AFTERNOON?

DAMN! THIS MOMMA'S BOY IS FINALLY BECOMING SELF SUPPORTING AT THE AGE OF TWENTY FOUR!
HEY CABBIE!

YOU AIN'T GOT A BODY IN THAT THING DO YA KID?
NAH— JUST A ROCKET LAUNCHER.
TAXI
STANLEY OLD BOY, YOU JUST MIGHT BE THE MOST SPOILED, LUCKIEST BUG ALIVE. THERE'S NO WAY IN HELL YOU WOULDVE GOTTEN THIS FAR IN MUSIC WITHOUT YOUR MOMS' SUPPORT.
DO YOU BELIEVE THIS? A CHECK FOR A TEN THOUSAND DOLLAR ADVANCE!
GOOD WORK, RALPHIE BOY!
WE DO HAVE ONE SLIGHT PROBLEM HERE... THE CHECK IS MADE OUT TO "BUGHOUSE". SINCE WE DON'T HAVE AN ACCOUNT FOR THE BAND, HOW THE HELL DO WE CASH THIS LITTLE FUCKER?
I MEAN, IVE BEEN DOWN TO BEANS AND RICE FOR A WEEK!
I ALREADY THOUGHT OF THAT RALPH! I FILED BUGHOUSE AS A BUSINESS NAME AND OPENED A CHECKING ACCOUNT.
'DA FUCK?
GIMME BACK THAT CHECK! I RAKED MY ASS OVER THE COALS TO GET AHOLD OF THAT THING!
BUT... BUT... BUT...
JESUS CHRIST JIMMY! I THOUGHT WE HAD AN UNDERSTANDING ABOUT THE BANDS' FINANCES! WHAT THE HELL IS THIS ALL ABOUT?!?

WELL, I... YEAH, UH... THAT IS TO SAY..
LOOK RALPHIE, CALM DOWN. I TOOK IT UPON MYSELF TO DO THIS ON MY OWN. DON'T BLAME JIMMY. I JUST TOLD HIM ABOUT IT ON THE WAY OVER HERE.
YOU KNOW HOW IT IS WITH OL' JIMMY WATTS— "I'LL PROVIDE THE TALENT AND EVERYONE ELSE PLEASE TAKE CARE OF MY SHIT."
WHOA! THANKS A LOT JULIE... FOR NOTHING!
WHETHER YOU INTEND IT OR NOT JIMMY, THAT'S HOW IT COMES DOWN. AND SINCE RALPH AND I ARE DUMB ENOUGH TO PUT UP WITH IT, WE INEVITABLY END UP GETTING PLAYED OFF EACH OTHER.
TRUE ENOUGH, TRUE ENOUGH. YET JIMMY ASKED ME TO LOOK AFTER THE BANDS' BUSINESS, AND I TOOK IT TO HEART. I NEGOTIATED US A TRULY SWEET DEAL!
SO I FEEL IT'S MY PEROGATIVE TO TAKE IT UP WITH YOU, BOSS MAN.
SO WHAT'S IT GONNA BE? YOU WANT ME HOLDING THE PURSE STRINGS? OR JULIE?

AARDVARK-VANAHEIM, INC.

Dear Milton & John:

Let me begin by saying how encouraging it was to see both of you in a 'fighting spirit' at the CAPITAL CITY SALES COMFERENCE this weekend. Considering that the bombshell announcement of the DC/Diamond deal had just struck I think you both exhibited a cool & focussed command both of yourselves and the situation. Congratulations.

Now that Marvel and DC have made their decisions, much of the direct market's attention has shifted to Image, so before I address a number of topics I discussed with you at the show, I'd like to outline how I see the Image situation at this juncture:

Given that they have three proposals in front of them at the moment (yours, Diamond's and Friendly Frank's) for exclusive distribution of Image Comics and that Larry Marder is the Executive Director and not the CEO of Image Comics, there is a certain amount of 'breathing space'. I hope I'm not violating Larry's confidences in observing that he has to serve as the conduit of information on these proposals a) to the Image lawyers and accountants b) from the lawyers and accountants to the partners c) from the partners back to you. Since Image has never been publicly defined it is unclear what a divided vote would mean (i.e. if two partners voted to go with Diamond, two with Capital, two with Friendly Frank's). It does not take a great deal of imagination to see that a simple 'yes' or 'no' vote is not especially likely. Whatever decision is arrived at will only come at the end of an extensive process of lively discussion between the six partners (and wouldn't I just love to be a fly on the wall). As the only previous experience Image has had in aligning itself (or rather themselves) with a large business entity was Malibu and given that their separation from Malibu was not entirely painless, I think we can all anticipate that they are going to do a lot of looking before they even consider doing any leaping.

Since Marvel, DC and Image are the only companies with a significant market share (double digits) in the 'Exclusive Derby', I think it is safe to say that -- after Image -- the market threatens to turn into an 'Exclusive Free-For-All'. Considering that it's still almost two months until the first launch of Marvel and DC on exclusive terms, I think it's very short-sighted of everyone currently operating on a level playing field to be jumping to the conclusion that exclusivity is the only viable option now that we have suffered through the first

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exchange of tactical nuclear weapons.

I appreciate the fact that neither of you directly addressed the issue of exclusivity relative to CEREBUS, that Milton understood that I meant what I said in our earlier phone conversation. CEREBUS will never again be distributed on an exclusive basis by anyone. I'll mention at this point that when Bill Schanes called me from Diamond to notify me that the DC/Diamond deal had been signed that he was very reassuring on the subject as well. Diamond was willing to talk about an exclusive deal, but they were willing to continue to carry CEREBUS on a non-exclusive basis as well. If there has ever been an occasion where a representative of Diamond or Capital has knowingly lied to me, I can't recall it; so, I am proceeding on the basis that I can take what I've been told at face value.

Aware that I have a kind of 'preferred status' (peculiar to loose cannons on a pitching deck), I asked Bill if there had been any change in Diamond's policy regarding 'minimum revenues' which must be generated for them to continue carrying a title. He assured me (and again I'm taking him at his word) that the status was 'quo' in that area. He was uncertain of the exact amount of revenue required, but did say, unequivocally, that if Diamond carries a book, they give it the benefit of the doubt for four or five issues before pulling the plug on it. I also know of several instances where they have made an exception based on critical success or testimonials from high profile members of the creative, publishing and retail communities. If anything, I think that (judging by the catalogues) both your's and Diamond's approach has been to err on the side of the widest possible selection rather than to confine yourselves to those titles which have the largest possible chance of success. I anticipate that, with the loss of two large suppliers in your case, and one large supplier in Diamond's case, the window of opportunity is open wider -- potential can only be realised in those areas amenable to a free marketplace (self-publishing and the small press foremost among them).

One final digression, before I move onto the formal agenda: I originally intended, as promised, to send you this letter strictly as a communication between Aardvark-Vanaheim and Capital City Distributors based on my conversation with John late on the Monday night of the Sales Conference. When the first dozen people I encountered on Tuesday mentioned the conversation I realised that this was no longer possible. You will be getting this letter FIRST, but after a few days I will be circulating it to Larry Marder, Bill Schanes and the Comics Buyer's Guide, as well as printing it in the June issue of CEREBUS (195). Idiosyncratic of me, I know, but I think there has been altogether too much 'closed door negotiation' in the direct market. I think comic book fans and retailers (ESPECIALLY retailers) are justified in feeling a white-hot rage at having their futures decided behind locked doors. The largest distributors and the largest publishers have (in my view) completely misread the mood of the marketplace in this area. The underlying assumption seems to have been that the retailers have a limitless tolerance for the presentation of drastic change as a fait accompli, that a large market share is carved in stone and that the erosion of good will is (or will be) marginal.

Unless all of the retailers I've been talking to are lying through their teeth, I anticipate that Marvel and DC are in for a very, very, VERY rude awakening this summer and fall. Your retailers feel betrayed (TWICE betrayed) by companies they had perceived themselves as supporting, companies they had helped make successful and profitable. Diamond retailers feel betrayed by Marvel and (now) embarrassed by their affiliation with DC -- as if a long-time friend had suddenly beaten up his wife in their presence. They are caught between the responsibility they feel to their customers and the violation of their sense of fair play as the foundation of the comic book business. For many this represents a wrenching dilemma. There is a nearly universal consensus that the only morally responsible answer is to make Marvel (and now DC) subscription only titles in their stores. Whatever limitations they impose, they all intend to impose limitations. In a marketplace where their options are being closed off one-by-one, they intend to make full use of the only weapons left to them: display space in their stores and how they intend to allocate it.

Given these realities, it seems only sensible to me that any discussion I have with you or Diamond should be completely open and above-board. My proposals are half-formed. I can sketch the parameters of what I see as a viable future of the direct market, based on my knowledge of the history of that market, the new variables which have been introduced into it and the needs and requirements of retailers, distributors, self-publishing creators and small press publishers. What is required is new thinking to go along with the new realities and new solutions to new (and many old) problems. Having discounted, out of hand, the good sense and insights of the most successful (seldom, if ever, the LARGEST) retailers in making their long-term plans, I think Marvel and DC have fumbled the ball with seconds left on the clock. So, I present these ideas as raw materials only, but with every confidence that all of the pieces are on the table in front of us and that, with the help of all concerned, we can assemble a picture out of them.

1. Ever since Diamond acquired Bud Plant, Capital City has been 'reacting' rather than 'taking action' in the direct market. This is not unlike DC's knee-jerk reaction to Marvel acquiring Heroes World. In an ever-expanding market this is a sensible course of action. You have to stay competitive. In an ever-collapsing market, this puts you at a disadvantage. Likewise with 'exclusivity'. The best you will manage is to sweeten Diamond's offer to whoever is 'in play'. You will lose more suppliers than you will win if it comes down to a tug-of-war. When 'crunch' time comes it is virtually impossible for the 'number two' to beat the 'number one' at the 'number one's game. All you can do is postpone 'losing' for a period of time.

2. Capital City still has enormous resources, most particularly in publishing. Capital City has behaved responsibly in clearly defining itself as a distributor ONLY, limiting its publishing capabilities to ADVANCE COMICS, INTERNAL

CORRESPNDENCE and other vehicles for the promotion of the material it distributes.

3. Catalogues are limited in the extent to which they can accurately inform retailers and assist retailers in making informed decisions. A cover reproduction and a brief description or 'Pick Hit' or 'Kool Kat' designation are marginally helpful. The only way to really get the feel for a comic book at the retail or consumer level is to read a few pages. Five pages of BONE or STRANGERS IN PARADISE or STRAY BULLETS is sufficient to tell you that it is a book worth reading.

Taking these three points, it occurs to me that at least a percentage of the money being invested in the ADVANCE COMICS megalogue could be put to better use in producing eight page handouts of self-published and small press books on glossy paper that could be sent to retailers six to eight months in advance of the release date of a title. Those retailers who are genuinely interested in attracting new readers to the comic book field and assisting in making quality comic books sell better would have a much better track record with extended lead time. Since people who shop for quality comic books tend to be infrequent customers, three or four months of exposure in sampler form in the better comic book stores would maximize a book's chance to get the best possible initial orders. As it stands, the interested retailer has a handful of days to digest a couple of hundred pages of capsule descriptions and make snap judgements as to what will sell or what won't. If they order three copies, every one of their customers has from Wednesday to Saturday to decide if they want to buy one of those three copies. If the first three customers decide they want it, those are the only customers who will be aware of it.

1. Although it is generally assumed and accepted that 'truly alternative' comics have a longer shelf life, this assessment is only accurate as far as it goes. 'Truly alternative' comics have <u>permanent</u> shelf life.

2. The resources which make Hyperlink possible could be applied as well to permanent shelf life comic books. By fixing a reasonable minimum retail dollar amount for a Periodical Hyperlink, a great deal could be done to facilitate the 'flow' of permanent shelf life comics through the participating stores. As it stands each book published regularly and reliably, with a growing audience, proceeds in 'fits and starts' as retailers can't get in issues 1 and 3 and by the time they do they're sold out of 2 and 4.

I think the reason that such a system has not been put in place is the worrisome logistics of the 'company-based' reality. Hyperlink works because it consists only of material with a proven track record. I would speculate that SPAWN would do better on such a system than would twenty different Extreme Studios titles. With the conventional

reorder systems, periodicals are available for a period of time and then are unavailable. A self-publisher like Terry Moore or Steve Bissette benefits because the reorder activity (within the window of opportunity) allows the retailer sixty days to service the demand for a single issue one and build an audience. RARE BIT FIENDS gets lost off of the system as a number one before most people are aware of it. The retailer has a lot more trouble turning someone onto an issue eight than an issue one (unless that retailer has all eight in stock). I am by no stretch of the imagination a computer systems person, but I think what is required is an extended period for reorder activity on the first four or five issues of a book and a computer system which can recognize when a title is 'doing a BONE', alerting you that the reorder activity is strong as well as indicating 'break-out potential' when it crosses a specific threshold so that a second wave of promotion can be initiated. Given that 'break-out potential' is not going to register all that often, such a system would allow for a focussed and effective 'push' at critical points where the investment of promotion man-hours and a few hundred dollars would pay the largest dividends. Your computer system would already have a template in BONE and STRANGERS IN PARADISE. I'd be willing to bet that STRAY BULLETS' printout would be similar, if not identical.

1. New distinctions are re

BULLETIN - 5 May (Anaheim, California) IMAGE COMICS ANNOUNCED TODAY THAT THEY WOULD TAKE OVER THE PUBLISHING OF JEFF SMITH'S BONE WITH ISSUE 21 OF THAT TITLE.

Interesting times, indeed, when you can't even finish a letter without a bulletin interrupting. Where was I?

1. New distinctions are required in ADVANCE COMICS to reflect the changing realities of Capital City and its new role in the marketplace.
2. It is worth continuing to track DC and Marvel's performance in ADVANCE COMICS, primarily to demonstrate that their form, approach and decision-making is completely out-of-date and out-of-touch with the direct market. Their forthcoming precipitous decline should serve as the most demonstrable evidence that Capital City is well rid of them.
3. These observations should be made separately.

By this, I mean that there should be two separate graphs, one each for Marvel and DC which can track their decline as it continues through this year and next (I imagine they will both be redundant and inconsequential by 1997, but in the meantime I think the retailers have earned the right to enjoy the show).

The actual 'pie chart' of comic book sales for Capital City (as John and I discussed) would better reflect the market by being represented by 'creator-controlled (self-publishing)', 'creator-owned (non-self-publishing)' and 'work-made-for-hire'. As I said

previously, I think both you and Diamond are to be commended for erring on the side of the widest diversity possible in the catalogues, but it is hardly an industry secret that Capital has, for some time, been the leader when it comes to 'widest diversity' -- Diamond has the widest diversity of which it is capable, given its size and its overhead requirements. I think it is 'putting your best foot forward' to emphasize this, both for yourselves and for your retailers. The progress which has been made in diminishing the influence of 'work-made-for-hire' in the comic book field has been considerable and (more importantly) admirable. I think if there was a tangible way to demonstrate where the market is going (and has been going for some time) now that DC and Marvel's corporate feelings are no longer an issue (at Capital anyway), we could all share in a new awareness of our common goal.

In advancing the idea of a 'creator-controlled (self-publishing)' pie slice, John asked me if I considered Image to be self-publishing. Of course I gave him Don Simpson's now-legendary quote 'one comic book, one universe, why pay more?' as my personal definition of self-publishing -- a creator who publishes his or her own work EXCLUSIVELY. The publishing company exists only as a 'Doing Business As...' designation. If Martin Wagner publishes HEPCATS he is a self-publisher. When he was publishing Sam Hurt's EYEBEAM he was a publisher who published one 'creator-controlled' book (HEPCATS) and one 'creator-owned' book (EYEBEAM).

As of a few minutes ago, Jeff Smith has just added another permutation. According to Larry Marder, Jeff will continue to self-publish his BONE trade paperbacks. Image will publish the BONE comic book. Here is a perfect example of 'creator-owned' versus 'creator-controlled'. If Image decides to sign an exclusive deal with Diamond, the BONE comic book would only be available from Diamond. You would still (presumably) be able to get the BONE trades for Hyperlink. The latter decision is Jeff's to make. The former decision isn't. Likewise with GROO. It is 'creator-owned' but it is not up to Sergio as to whether he sells GROO to Capital.

Unless, of course, it IS.

That's what makes the Image decision on 'exclusivity' so interesting. It forces them to define themselves (finally!). If a simple majority carries the day (four votes for exclusive with Diamond, two votes for exclusive with Capital, Diamond wins), then it's safe to say that Image is simply a publishing company, a six-way partnership where the control is collective but democratic. If Image divides over the issue, much hinges on whether it fractures into two or three companies which offer their 'creator-owners' a choice of which Image they want to be a part of: Capital Image, Diamond Image, or Sell to Everybody Image or if the 'creator-owners' (Sergio, Jeff, etc. -- the non-partners) are simply informed of what Image they are a part of. Then, to me, the distinction between Image and Marvel is a difference of shading. I suspect that's true. I hope it's not.

Assuming that the consequences of participating in 'exclusivity' are severe (loss of good will on the part of the retailers, plummeting

sales), the distinction between 'creator-controlled' and 'creator-owned' becomes even more critical. The creator, without being consulted on the choices, nor made aware of the potential consequences is made to suffer those consequences. Many would say this is unfair, but I beg to differ. By signing a contract with a company, the creator has made a choice and must be willing to suffer the consequences of that company's decision-making for the duration of his or her contract. If the owner of the company decides to sell the company, the contracts go too(a non-transferable clause does not apply in an acquisition; there are exceptions but it usually costs tens of thousands of dollars to win a contract back in court). If the owner decides only to sell to one distributor and the creator's sales go down by sixty percent and the creator's reputation suffers irreparable damage as a result, the creator has only him or herself to blame.

This turned into a longer letter than I intended it to be. I did want to keep the number of points to a minimum -- essentially a changed format for INTERNAL CORRESPONDENCE with pie charts that reflect yours and the market's changed reality, a program to chart the success rate of self-published books on your computer system, an expanded lead time to allow the retailers to do a thorough job of exposing their customers to a new, potentially-great title BEFORE publication and the addition of a self-publishing Hyperlink to facilitate a flow of 'break-out' self-published titles through the stores and into the hands of customers. Of course, there's no need to limit such a program to self-published titles. STRAY BULLETS published by Dark Horse or Fantagraphics would still be STRAY BULLETS by David Lapham. The question, of course, is who will decide which unpublished comic books would be best-suited to such a program. And this is my final point:

1. Tom Fassbender would be my first choice to head up such a program (Steve Harold at Diamond). I have yet to see him miss a potential 'break-out' book on the way by.
2. Both of you. Since it is your company and your resources I think it would be very helpful if your personal endorsement could be attached to any book getting 'special treatment'.
3. People who work at Capital who don't read comic books. Since we have all been talking for years about bringing new people into the field as readers, I can't think of a better test audience.

Having concluded my 'new business', I'd like to reiterate my earlier observation in conversation with John that it makes sense to me that Capital City (and Diamond as well, if they're interested) investigate the feasability of financial safety nets for those self-published books with a track record early in their run which are encountering the two largest self-publisher 'speed bumps':

1. Reprinting of early issues. Many self-publishers verging on success run into a 'credit crunch' with their printers. They have reorders for their first three issues and no backstock and no cash on hand to pay for printing of the new issue, let alone reprinting of the earlier issues. If Capital could institute a program whereby the self-publisher's printer was paid for reprinted material DIRECTLY (to avoid the self-publisher using advance payment to pay something other than the printing bill) and paying the balance to the self-publisher in the standard 30 days it would help a great deal in maintaining the necessary supply line.

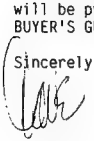
2. Printing the first trade paperback collection. The same problem, of course. A trade paperback printing bill is that much larger and depletes cash reserves instantly. Again, the printer should be paid directly.

Anticipating the inevitable, I think it would be wrong to attach such a program to an 'exclusivity' condition. I see nothing wrong with just paying for your share of the printing bill (i.e. the per unit cost of the books, multiplied by the number of copies you've ordered -- cost of the books in this case meaning the cost of PRINTING each of the books). If Diamond wants to institute a similar program, the printer would just get two cheques and whichever distributor was more effective in building sales would make the largest revenues. I know for a fact that there are self-published titles that do better at Capital and self-published titles that do better at Diamond. You will have self-published books in common on such a program and self-published books the other guy doesn't have -- by CHOICE, in a free marketplace and on a level playing field.

This letter is being faxed to you May 8. It will be faxed to Larry Marder May 12, to Bill Schanes and the COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE May 21 and will be printed in CEREBUS 195 shipping the first or second week of June.

I'm soliciting comments and suggestions from all parties which will be printed in CEREBUS and made available to the COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE.

Sincerely,



Dave Sim

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(issues 52-80) **$30**

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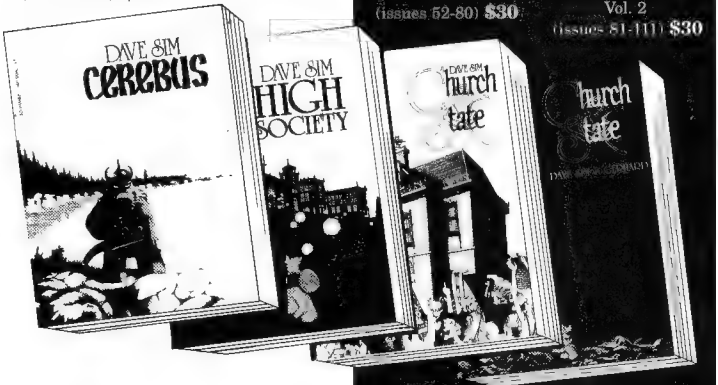

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(issues 139-150)
$17

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$17

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(issues 163-174)
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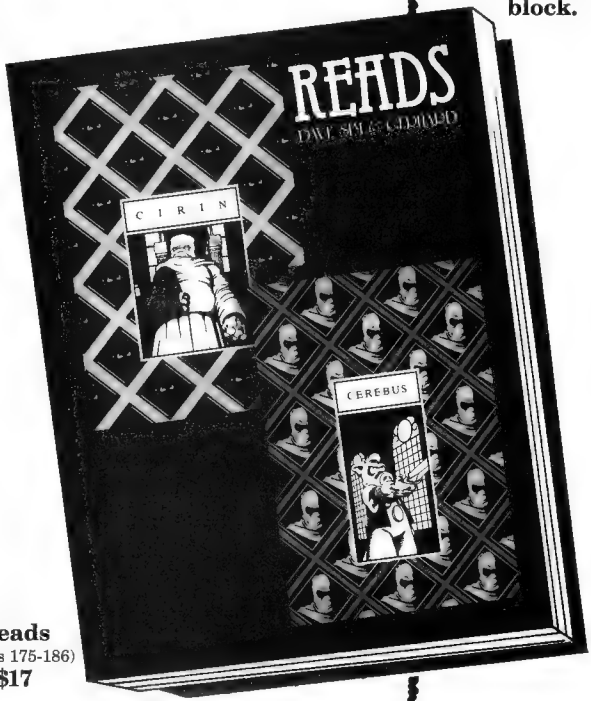
CEREBUS NUMBER ZERO (reprinting the 'in-between' stories from Cerebus 51, 112/113 and 137-138) ($2.25)

There's a new kid on the block.



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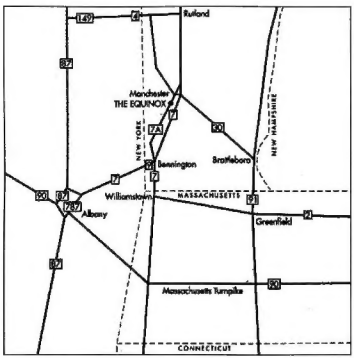

From New York:
Route 87 North to Exit 23, then 787 North to 7 East (becomes 9 East at NY/VT border). Continue to Bennington and turn left onto 7 North. Take Exit 3, turn left onto 313, then right onto Historic Route 7A North and drive 12 miles to The Equinox.

From Albany Airport:
Route 87 North to Route 7 East. Follow remaining directions from New York.

From Brattleboro:
Route 30 North to Historic Route 7A in Manchester. Turn left and proceed south just over one mile to The Equinox.

From Boston:
Route 2 West to I-91 North. Take Exit 2 in Brattleboro, then follow directions from Brattleboro.

From Montreal:
New York Route 87 South to Exit 20; follow 4 East to Rutland and 7 South, then onto Historic Route 7A into Manchester.

MANCHESTER, VERMONT

This time around, the local liaison and the Retailer du Jour are one and the same (largely because I'm eager to see the next issue of *TYRANT* and I don't want anyone bothering Bissette):

John Rovnak
COMICS ROUTE
Green Mountain Village Shops
Route 7A Main Street
Manchester Center, Vermont 05255
(phone and fax) (802) 362-3698

Same deal as before. If you're a small-press publisher or self-publisher and you want John to display and sell your books at the show, send him a sample copy at the address above and he'll get back to you. Since COMICS ROUTE already specializes in alternative, small-press and self-published titles, the odds are pretty good that he already carries your book.

John has provided a list of reasonably priced accommodations for those coming in from out of town. Please be aware that the event takes place on the Fourth of July weekend (or, for many of you, Canada Day weekend) and you should book as early as possible to make sure you have a room when you get here:

The Aspen Motel
Box 548,
Manchester Center, VT
05255
(802) 362-2450

The Chalet Motel
Rts. 11/30, Manchester, VT
1-800-343-9900

The Stamford Motel
Rte. 7A North,
Manchester Center, VT
(802) 362-2342

Manchester View Motel
Route 7A North,
Manchester Center, VT
1-800-548-4141

★★★★★★★★★★

In the interests of KIRSS (Keep It Really Simple, Stupid), John, Steve and Rick have arranged to have the after-the-event party in the same room (the Manchester and Arlington Rooms; we outgrew the Bennington Room a couple of months back). Everybody just splits for a while to get something to eat, and when we come back — voilà — tables are gone and there's a bar set up in the corner. Pretty neat.

★★★★★★★★★★

Steve Bissette will be doing his 'Journeys into Fear' slide show the night before (Mark Bode will also be carrying on his father's legacy with a presentation of his CARTOON CONCERT). See the ad in this issue for location and times. I'll be doing an introduction for it and there will be a small admission charge to benefit the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund. If you can POSSIBLY make it for the slide show, you really should. I promise you won't regret it. We'll all be headed to the bar that night (June 30) for a few nightcaps when the show's over — probably after 9 p.m.

★★★★★★★★★★

TABLE AVAILABILITY FOR THE REMAINING STOPS: Chicago, Illinois; August 12 (tables available)... Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; September 9, University Center Holiday Inn, Lytton Ave. (slim pickings at this point)... Kansas City, Missouri; November 4 (CANCELLED — Richard Corben's FANTAGOR PRESS on hiatus — refund cheques on the way)... December 3; Kitchener, Ontario, Walper Hotel Grand Ballroom, King & Queen Streets (slim pickings as well).

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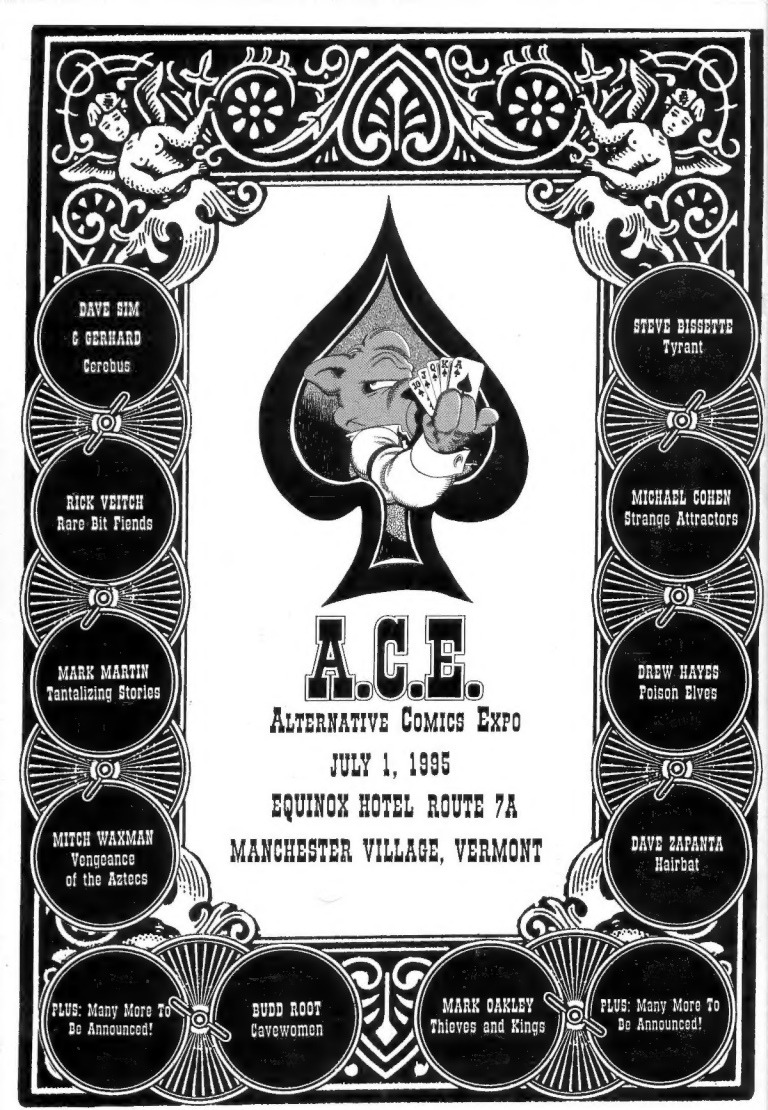
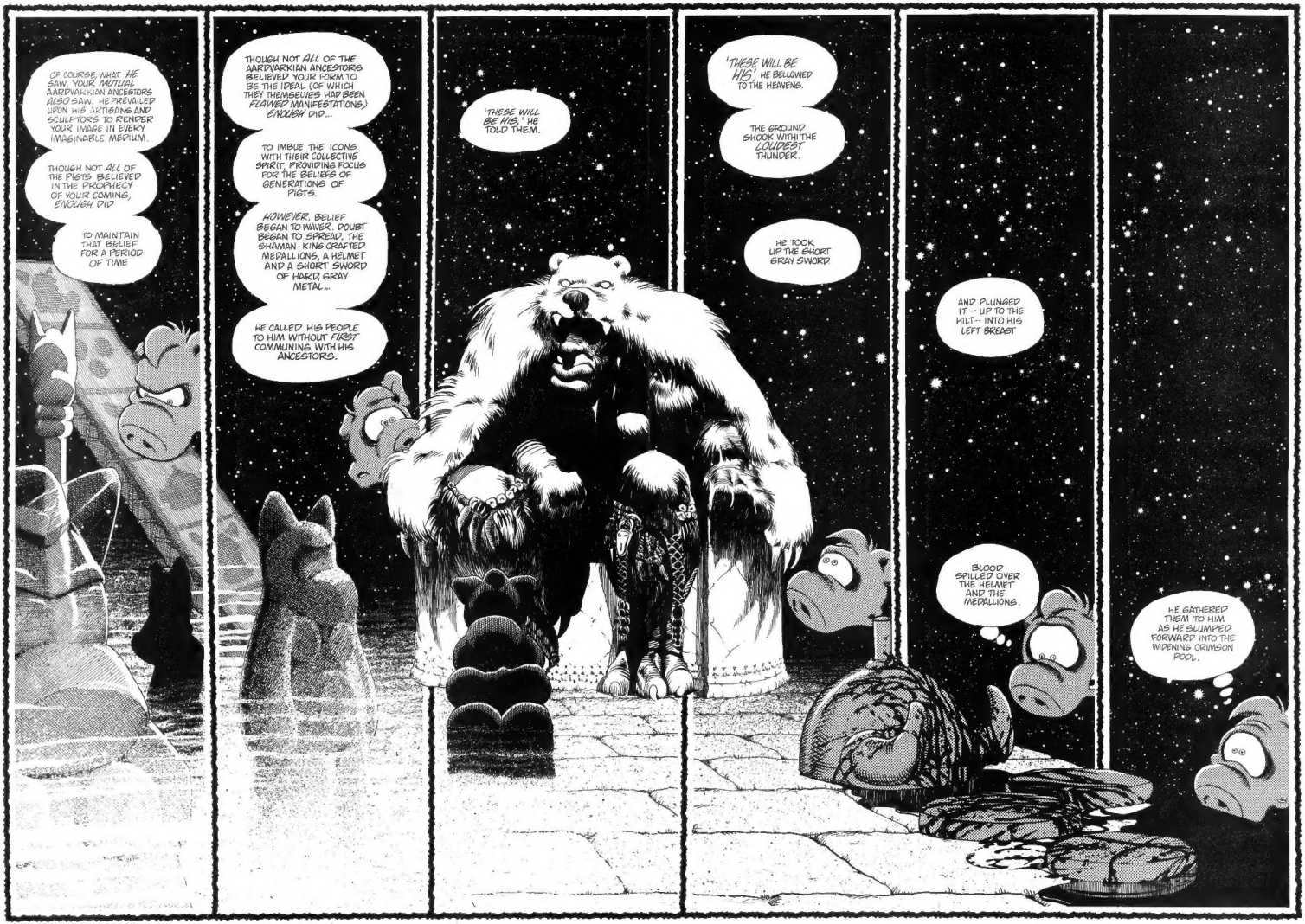


more information on inside back cover


OF COURSE, WHAT HE SAW, YOUR MUTUAL AARDVARKIAN ANCESTORS ALSO SAW. HE PREVAILED UPON HIS ARTISANS AND SCULPTORS TO RENDER YOUR IMAGE IN EVERY IMAGINABLE MEDIUM.
THOUGH NOT ALL OF THE PIGS BELIEVED IN THE PROPHECY OF YOUR COMING, ENOUGH DID
TO MAINTAIN THAT BELIEF FOR A PERIOD OF TIME
THOUGH NOT ALL OF THE AARDVARKIAN ANCESTORS BELIEVED YOUR FORM TO BE THE IDEAL (OF WHICH THEY THEMSELVES HAD BEEN FLAWED MANIFESTATIONS) ENOUGH DID...
TO IMBUE THE ICONS WITH THEIR COLLECTIVE SPIRIT, PROVIDING FOCUS FOR THE BELIEFS OF GENERATIONS OF PIGS.
HOWEVER, BELIEF BEGAN TO WAVER. DOUBT BEGAN TO SPREAD. THE SHAMAN-KING CRAFTED MEDALLIONS, A HELMET AND A SHORT SWORD OF HARD, GRAY METAL...
HE CALLED HIS PEOPLE TO HIM WITHOUT FIRST COMMUNING WITH HIS ANCESTORS.
'THESE WILL BE HIS,' HE TOLD THEM.
'THESE WILL BE HIS,' HE BELLOWED TO THE HEAVENS.
THE GROUND SHOOK WITH THE LOUDEST THUNDER.
HE TOOK UP THE SHORT GRAY SWORD
AND PLUNGED IT -- UP TO THE HILT -- INTO HIS LEFT BREAST
BLOOD SPILLED OVER THE HELMET AND THE MEDALLIONS.
HE GATHERED THEM TO HIM. AS HE SLUMPED FORWARD INTO THE WIDENING CRIMSON POOL.